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OR, THE GOTHAM FLATS MYSTERY.

BY JACKSON KNOX
(OLD HAWK.)

CHAPTER I.

A TWO-FOLD MYSTERY AND A DOUBLE CRIME.

A TERRIBLE double murder, the most startling and most mysterious on record in New York!

Such was the impression of the horrified community.

The swift successive assassinations of a lovely mother and a fascinating daughter; doubtless by the same ruthless hand; death in both instances mysteriously effected without a visible wound or contusion!

Of the fiendishly skillful perpetrator, at first, not a footprint, not a vestige, not the faintest clew!

No wonder the police were mystified, the detectives reticent, the newspapers indignant, the public appalled.

The facts in the case were these:

At the first glimmer of a certain October dawn, a furiously-driven coupe dashed along

"'TIS THE GREAT DETECTIVE'S EMBLEM!" HE EXCLAIMED. "YOU ARE, INDEED, HAWK HERON!"

the northern or Twenty-sixth street boundary of Madison Square, from the east.

It attracted the attention of the sole occupant of the square, a young man who had sat under a tree for hours, with his gaze riveted on the entrance of the Hotel Brunswick.

The *coupe* came to a sudden stop in the middle of the block.

A very large man sprung out, bearing something white in his arms.

He deposited his burden on a plot of grass, regarded it intently for an instant, then darted back into the vehicle, and was driven rapidly away.

"I'm in luck this morning!" muttered the lonely watcher, approaching the white object. "While deep in one mystery, here is a fresh one thrust under my very nose!"

He paused after taking a few steps, and, placing his fingers between his lips, sounded a shrill, whistling call.

A ragged little boy, with a bootblack's equipment slung over his shoulder, started into view from a near clump of shrubbery, rubbing his eyes.

"Nixey," said the unknown, "shadow that corner yonder, and don't take your eyes off the Brunswick entrance."

The lad obeyed in silence.

Then, as the unknown neared the white object, he observed a bare-headed man likewise approaching it on the run from the opposite direction.

But the next instant, as the nature of the white object was made apparent, he thought of nothing else.

"Vengeance of Heaven!" he exclaimed, recoiling; "it is a human form—the body of a young girl, beautiful and lifeless!"

The face of the other man, who now came up, was streaming with blood, and he was panting hard. He was an old man, apparently a German.

"Ah, I am too late!" hoarsely gasped the newcomer, with a slightly foreign accent, as he flung himself by the inanimate form. "It is my pupil—my beautiful Olga—and dead, dead!"

"There is no wound, no sign of violence, that I can see," said the first comer, stooping to examine the body.

"She was sensitive as a flower!" cried the other. "The shock of finding herself in that masked villain's power would have been enough!"

"Were you chasing the carriage from which I saw this poor girl carried but a few moments ago?"

"Yes, yes! But first I had been knocked senseless. Otherwise I might have overtaken it. Oh, what a shock is in store for this poor child's mother!"

"What are you saying?"

"Oh, useless words, no doubt! She may also be dead by this time! The masked fiend may have murdered the mother before abducting the daughter!"

"What complicated horror is this? Quick! give me an explanation before the police arrive. I may be of more service than you fancy."

The old man looked the speaker over.

He saw a powerfully athletic man, still young, with dark, earnest features and the eye of an eagle, but seedily, almost miserably, clad.

"No, no!" groaned the old man, dubiously. "You could be of no service, I am afraid."

Then he burst out afresh over the inanimate girl.

"Dead! done to death in the charming freshness of her beauty and her gifts!" he raved.

"Ah, if the indomitable detective, whose services the widow Ashcombe so prayed for, were but here! If Hawk Heron, the detective, could only be found!"

A joyous light leaped into the first-comer's face.

"Why, I am Hawk Heron!" he cried

"Impossible!"

"Bible truth, I tell you!"

"Prove it! There is a sign—an infallible mark."

"Behold!" said the younger man, tearing open the bosom of his vest and shirt.

Tattooed upon the smooth white chest, in bold relief, was an artistic representation of a hawk, or falcon, in the act of striking down a black vulture in mid-air.

The old man gave an eager cry.

"'Tis the great detective's emblem!" he exclaimed. "You are, indeed, Hawk Heron!"

By this time daylight had broadened, and a roundsman and two patrolmen made their appearance.

Hawk Heron, as we shall call the younger man, made them a significant sign, which caused them to regard him respectfully.

"Officers, take charge of this poor girl's body," said he, after briefly explaining what had happened. "I will in the mean time accompany this old man to the place where she lived, and then report."

"All right, Mr. Heron," said the roundsman, dispatching his subordinates for a stretcher. "You will be responsible for the old man's appearance when wanted?"

"Of course."

Heron then made a parting sign to the lad he

had posted at the corner, and walked rapidly to the eastward, accompanied by the old German.

"Answer my questions as we go along," said he.

The German groaned, but nodded submissively.

"Who and what are you?"

"My name is Wolfgang Schmidt. I am a teacher of music. I live at the Gotham Flats, 16 Montauk place, top floor."

"What of that poor girl?"

"Her name was Olga Ashcombe. She was my pupil. For three months she had been singing successfully at the Thalia Theater. She lived with her mother, a wax-flower-maker, in the floor just under the one I occupy as a bachelor."

"What of Olga's abduction?"

"I returned home half-an-hour ago from the German Singing Club I belong to. As I was groping my way up the stairs, I met a masked man coming down them, with the half-senseless form of Olga in his arms."

"Half-senseless?"

"Yes; for she was struggling and moaning feebly."

"How could you note all this when you were groping your way?"

"The man carried a lighted candle in his disengaged right hand."

"Well, what else did you note?"

"Nothing. He at once threw the heavy candle-stick at me, cutting my head open, and knocking me senseless."

"What then?"

"I must have recovered very quickly. I heard the street door being closed, and then the rattle of wheels. Bleeding and dizzy as I was, I gave chase. You know the rest, mynheer."

"Had you noticed a *coupe* at the street-door as you entered?"

"No; but there might have been one there, for all that?"

"Are you naturally so unobservant?"

"No; but just then my head was full of the songs we had been singing, and the toasts in honor of my adored pupil's success at the Thalia."

"What was the masked man like?"

"A great, powerful man, well-dressed, I think. But, how should I know? Oh, misery, misery! I am distracted!"

"Control yourself. Did Olga live alone with her mother?"

"Yes."

"No servant?"

"None; but an old woman, Norah, came early every morning, to make the fire and cook their breakfast."

"Well, yonder is the Gotham."

"Yes; but you, mynheer, must break the news to the widow. I sha'n't have the courage to."

But, just as they were entering the building, a window on the fourth floor rattled open.

"Murder! murder!" screamed a wrinkled old woman, thrusting out her head. "Police! police!"

"Mein Gott!" gasped the music-master.

"That is old Norah! What can have happened to Frau Ashcombe?"

"Follow me!" cried Heron.

With the old man at his heels, he dashed into the house and up the flights.

Something had indeed happened to the widow Ashcombe!

Her half-dressed dead body lay in her little parlor.

The old woman, who had doubtless just discovered the fact, still stood at the window chattering with fear, as the two men burst into the room.

The widow had in life been a singularly attractive woman of thirty-five, and she was yet beautiful in death.

Dead she certainly was, though at the first glance she presented no more indication of having met a violent death than had her daughter.

The old music-master was already in a fresh paroxysm of grief.

"Dead, too!" he exclaimed, wringing his hands. "Murdered, like the daughter, without a wound, without a scar, and doubtless by the same remorseless hand!"

The detective lost no time in dispatching the old woman for the police. A strange sternness had come into his face.

"You must compose yourself!" said he, gently putting Mr. Schmidt aside, and, bending over the body that lay half-extended upon a lounge, he examined the throat and neck. "Ha! No mystery here as to the murderer's method, at all events!"

"How?"

The detective pointed to a slight discoloration of the throat, and made a significant wrenching gesture.

"Garroted!" said he, quietly. "The throat was suddenly encircled from behind. There was a serpent-like pressure, a throttling hug, a murderous twist, and the neck was dislocated as effectually as by the hangman's cord! Pah!"

"Horrible!" exclaimed Schmidt. "This crime must have gone before the daughter's abduction."

"And was, perhaps, the cause of it."

"You think so?"

"Yes; Olga would else have proved a troublesome witness."

"Oh, if Olga herself were not dead—if she could but speak!"

"Out of the question. Did you know anything of this woman's past history?"

"Nothing."

"Nothing whatever?"

"On that subject both mother and daughter were secret as the grave."

"You never thought her widowhood might be pretended?"

"No; but she seemed constantly haunted by a secret dread."

"As if afraid of being tracked—as if under a pursuing menace?"

"Yes."

"So! Was she conversant with any foreign tongue, do you know?"

"Yes; with both German and Russian, though imperfectly."

"Enough! Count Ivan Kotzka, there was ever a method in your murderous madness! Methinks I recognize it in this double crime!"

This was said abstractedly.

"How?" cried the music-master. "You have a clew to the perpetrator?"

The detective bit his lip.

"On your life, repeat not what just escaped me!" said he, impressively. "Now, one more question."

"Speak, mynheer."

"Why had this poor woman prayed for the services of Hawk Heron?"

"I do not know."

"She hinted no explanation?"

"Only that she had known you abroad in better days—before her husband's death, and when Olga was a mere child."

"Nothing more?"

"Nothing, save that your presence might save her from some impending misfortune."

"Did she never mention the name of Kotzka?"

"Never in my hearing."

Hawk Heron's head sunk upon his breast. For a moment he seemed the prey of powerful and agonizing emotions, from which he was aroused by the sound of heavy footsteps ascending the stairs.

"Here are the police," said he, starting. "Remember, old man, not a word of what has passed between us!"

"Not a word, mynheer. But, then—"

"Fear not for the result! With Hawk Heron, the detective, on his trail, the doer of these awful deeds shall be surely hounded to the gibbet's foot!"

CHAPTER II.

HAWK HERON ON THE TRAIL.

THE old woman Norah, had spread the news so effectually that, of the group of policemen who now put in an appearance, the greater number were at once employed in keeping back the crowd of morbid sight-seers.

It was evident that the sergeant in command, to whom Hawk made his report, held the detective in the highest estimation.

"Had I better arrest the old German?" was one of his first questions.

"By no means," said Hawk. "I'll be responsible for him."

"How about the old woman here?"

"Detain her, if you like. But I think both she and Schmidt will pan out more freely with the little they know if let alone."

"All right."

"Have you telegraphed to Head-quarters?"

"Only a few words."

"I shall carry a detailed account there, after saying a few more words to the old German in his own apartments."

Mr. Schmidt's rooms overhead betokened a musical Bohemian's eccentric tastes. Besides a medley of musical instruments, there were great numbers of canary birds and other feathered pets hung in cages all about the interior.

Mr. Schmidt was still in a dazed condition.

"Never again shall I take pleasure in my little home!" he brokenly exclaimed, sinking into a seat. "My beautiful pupil, my Olga, used to take her lessons here and play with my birds. She will come no more!"

"Brace up!" said Hawk. "So much the greater reason why we should avenge her death and that of her poor mother!"

The music-master suddenly started up, striking his forehead.

"Mein Gott!" he cried. "Those men must be one and the same!"

"What men?" cried Hawk, eagerly.

"The masked man on the stairs—the abductor—and the man in the theater!"

"Oho! This is like business! What man in the theater?"

"The immensely big man in the audience, whose serpent gaze so troubled my poor Olga night after night!"

"Why hav'n't you spoken of this before?"

"I had only thinking-room for these horrible events. Now things are clearer."

"Tell me of the man in the theater."

"He came regularly for more than a week."

including last night. Always he occupied the one seat. Always he sat like a statue, fixing Olga with his snakish eyes."

"Describe him."

"Much over six feet, portly in proportion, doubtless of gigantic strength. Elaborate evening dress, with a great diamond in his shirt. Fifty years old, black beard and mustache, short, bristling black hair, and piercing eyes, whose glance made your flesh creep."

It was now the detective's turn to give a start of surprise.

"Wonderful!" he muttered to himself. "The same description tallies with the supposed forger I have been shadowing for a week past!"

Then he added, aloud:

"Good! Your description, mynheer, is succinct enough for a hand-bill. You say this man haunted Olga's performances night after night?"

"Yes."

"How long would he remain?"

"About twenty minutes; say between nine and half-past nine."

"Always at that hour?"

"Always. He had timed Olga's appearance in a particular German song, and never missed fascinating her during its rendition. Then he would disappear."

"And that," again soliloquized the detective, "would give him ample margin for visiting the Casino, where I have repeatedly marked my man. Marvelous!"

"What did you say, mynheer?"

"Nothing of moment. You say he fascinated Olga?"

"Yes; or terrified her unaccountably. Whenever she passed me behind the scenes, after undergoing that basilisk gaze, she was white and trembling."

"Had you or she ever seen him before his appearance at the theater?"

"I never had. Olga was uncertain. His face haunted her like one she might have known and feared in her infancy."

"Ah! Was her mother informed of this man's pursuit of Olga?"

"No. We feared to terrify her, and kept quiet."

"Well, mynheer, do you keep quiet while I am absent?"

"Trust me, Mr. Heron, for remaining here, and saying nothing."

"A last question. So, you think there was a resemblance between Olga's abductor and her serpent-eyed haunter of the theater?"

"In build and hight, yes."

"Enough."

Ten minutes later, Hawk Heron was waiting for a down-train at the Twenty-eighth street station of the Third Avenue Elevated road.

It was still early morning, at the hight of the commission hours' rush.

The platform was densely crowded, mostly with working people, eager to reach their places of employment.

Suddenly, as the train approached, Heron felt a paper slipped into his hand.

Before he could search whence it came, there was a general rush, then a recoil, during which an enormously fat and tall man, in a workman's dress, backed rudely against him, tramping on his toes.

"Oaf! mind what you're about!" growled the detective, punching him in the back.

Then, as the fellow heedlessly shouldered ahead, with Hawk slowly following in the press, the latter threw his eye over the paper, which bore the following scrawl in pencil:

"Hawk Heron, beware! Expert as you are, your persistence in this morning's murder case will cost you your life!"

Hawk digested this warning while standing on a car platform, the train being in motion and crowded to excess.

"Who the deuce could have given me this?" he muttered. "The devil seize that obese giant who trod on my toes! But for him, I would have had the warning-giver by the throat."

He was so jammed against the car gate as to be hardly able to turn his head.

"Nevertheless, the jam was sensibly augmented, rather than diminished, at the next four stopping-places."

Then, just as the train was getting clear of the Ninth-street station, the same obese giant, red in the face, came rushing out of the car, scattering the crowd right and left.

"Sacre! zis is ze station zat I most get off!" he spluttered, thrusting the brakeman aside, and tearing open the gate. "Ah, mon Dieu! what haff I commit? Ze poor young man! He vill be dash to pieces!"

The substance of this alarm was now taken up by many voices, and with reason.

The "poor young man" was none other than our hero.

Apparently without intention, he had been hurled through the gate by the giant's blundering rush, and was now dangling over the street by a mere finger-hold upon the lattice-rail of the swiftly speeding cars.

Yet, even when realizing that he would doubtless be dashed to death in an instant, Hawk nevertheless glared up at his persecutor with mingled suspicion and resentment.

"Curse you!" he gasped. "I half-believe you purposed my destruction!"

Leaning far over the gate, the giant's eyes seemed to dilate gloatingly as he peered down at his dangling victim.

"V'at!" he hissed between his teeth. "You take not ze first warning, zen v'at you expect? Ah! ze telegraph-wire cut off ze legs of ze poor young man!"

Hawk just had time and strength to clear the Cooper Institute telegraph-wires crossing underneath the track.

Then, noticing a friendly tree-top just beneath, he let go his hold, spreading himself out and scudding into it like a flying-squirrel.

A passing policeman assisted him, considerably scratched and bruised, to the ground, while the train thundered along overhead.

"A narrow escape, young man!" exclaimed the functionary. "What! Hawk Heron, is it you?"

"Yes," panted Hawk; "but it's another man I'm after."

And he sped toward the Houston-street station like a bolt from a gun.

The passengers were pouring down the steps, but the fat giant was not among them.

Hawk dashed up into the station just as the train was gliding away.

He interchanged a sign of recognition with the gateman.

"A noticeably big man, in working clothes, with a red face!" he whispered, hurriedly.

"Have you seen such a one?"

"Yes; just a minute ago."

"Which way?"

"Down-stairs. He was the first off the train; spry as a kitten in spite of his size. A young woman with a basket follered him through the gate."

"The deuce!"

"What's up?"

Without waiting to reply, Hawk regained the sidewalk.

"Curse the fellow!" he muttered; "he has given me the slip."

But as he was hurrying along Houston street with the intention of saying nothing at Headquarters of his misadventure, his heart gave an exultant leap.

There, in front of a tall, dingy tenement, stood the object of his search, talking confidentially with a handsome young woman who carried a small basket.

"I'm trumps again!" muttered Hawk, darting behind a grocer's wagon and observing the pair intently. "Wait! That girl with a basket—surely I saw her in the crowd when that mountain of flesh flattened out my toes. Might she not have slipped the writing into my hand? Doubtless! And hasn't all this a connection with this morning's murders? Like enough!"

While these reflections were flashing through his mind he was making sure that he had his weapons and handcuffs in readiness.

Then he bounded toward his prospective prey without a warning word.

Quick as he was, however, the man and girl were quicker.

They had disappeared into the tenement in an instant, slamming the door in his face and locking it.

Hawk Heron was possessed of an immense muscular strength, in strange contrast with his slenderness of frame.

In another instant the door, torn from its fastenings, was hurled inward before his wrenching onset, and he was following the fugitives through a long, miserably-lighted passage.

"Halt, in the name of the law!" cried the detective, covering the giant with his revolver.

"Halt, or you're a dead man!"

The colossus turned, seeming to hesitate, while the girl, suddenly opening a small door, stood looking back, pale and breathless, from the threshold of a dark interior.

"Vat is ze mazzar?" cried the man, making a grimace and throwing up his hands. "I do nuzzing wrong—I commit no crime!"

"We'll see about that. At all events, you hurled me off the train."

"Ah, mon Dieu! you are zat poor young man?"

"Yes; and you are my prisoner!"

"Oh, my sweet Adolphe! you must surrender," called out the young woman, in excellent English. "The law summons you. And see; he has three policemen behind him!"

Thrown off his guard, the detective turned to look for the unexpected reinforcement—which, of course, wasn't there.

As he did so, there was an ominous click, followed by a report, and a bullet whistled through his hat.

However, though baffled, he was so close upon the fugitive's heels as he disappeared through the opening, followed by the girl, that the latter dropped her basket outside the door that shut out further pursuit.

In vain did Hawk again essay his herculean strength.

The door was as immovable as if backed by masonry.

He accordingly appropriated the basket, and retraced his steps, mentally photographing the locality, inside and out.

"What have we here?" he muttered, opening the basket, after regaining the sidewalk. "Like enough a workwoman's lunch, or—Ha! Mystery of mysteries! Are this morning's murders to twine me perpetually with their invisible links?"

The basket contained a beautiful design in wax. Appended to it was a business card bearing the name and address of Olga's mother—the murdered wax-worker whose remains he had quitted scarcely twenty minutes before.

But the design itself?

It was that of a falcon, with a stricken vulture in its grip, in the form of a medallion, all in wax, and tastefully wreathed!

"This revelation affects me personally," said Hawk, pursuing his way, after covering up the basket. "So I think I shall be justified in keeping it to myself, at least for the time being."

He reached the Head-quarters in Mulberry street without further interruption.

"Is the chief here?" he asked at the door of the Detective Bureau.

"Not yet, Mr. Heron," replied the officer in charge. "But it is nearly seven o'clock, the chief's hour."

"All right," said Hawk. "I'll be with him soon."

He disappeared into a small room near at hand, from which he presently emerged, without the basket, and a greatly changed man externally.

He had gone into the room resembling a young mechanic out of a job and down in his luck.

He came out of it an elegantly attired man-about-town, almost a dude in his general make-up, with an eyeglass at his eye, a flower-sprig in his button-hole and a toy cane in his hand.

A moment later he was closeted with the chief of the Detective Bureau.

"Now, captain," said Hawk, when he had finished his recital. "Will you give me a *carte blanche*, roving commission in this double mystery?"

"But can you do it justice, Hawk, while looking up your forger?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"There is a connection between the cases."

"What?"

"It is true."

"You amaze me!"

"Yes; but I can't explain now. Can I go ahead on my own hook?"

"Why, with all my heart, if you think you are equal to it!" cried the chief. "You know I consider you without a peer on the force."

"Thanks. How shall I know this London detective, Blithers, who is to meet me to-day about this foreign forgery case?"

"Here is his photograph. He sent it an hour ago, directly after quitting the steamer, by a district messenger."

"Ah!"

"Yes; and he's reckoned a keen one at Scotland Yard. I suppose he'll be down here some time to-day with his credentials."

Hawk was inspecting the photo. It was that of a middle-aged, beardless man, of large, open countenance, with short-cropped, curling light hair, and apparently of a tall, portly and powerful physique.

"So," thought Hawk, half-aloud. "There seems to be a regular run of big and fleshy men of late."

"What is that you say?"

"Nothing of importance, captain. A mere coincidence."

"How do you like Blithers's looks?"

"Well enough in the picture, but I'll answer better after seeing him in person. Where is he stopping?"

"At the Brunswick."

"How? The Brunswick, too? Wheels within wheels!"

"Anything odd in Blithers's stopping at the Brunswick?"

"No, no! Only another coincidence. Good-morning!"

"Hold on, Heron!" said the chief, an attendant at that moment handing him a telegram. "This dispatch will interest you."

"What is it?"

"It is from the precinct covering this morning's tragedies. Daughter's body has been sent to her former home, to keep the poor mother's company. Inquest on both this afternoon. One Schmidt, living in same house, will bear expense of funerals."

"Glad to hear he's able to," commented Hawk. "If I am not at the inquest, I'll be represented there."

CHAPTER III.

THICKENING MYSTERIES.

AFTER disposing of a hearty breakfast, of which he was greatly in need, Hawk Heron lost no time in returning to Madison Square.

That fashionable locality now presented a scene of bustling life, in sharp contrast with the early dawn that had glimmered softly on Olga Ashcombe's lifeless form on the dewy greensward a few hours before.

Faithful to his trust, Nixey still occupied his post in the northeast corner, with his eyes riveted on the Hotel Brunswick entrance.

"What luck, Nixey?"

"Bully!"
 "Ha! You spotted the man I've been shadowing at the theaters?"
 "He skipped inter the Brunswick twenty minutes arter you stuck me here."

"On foot?"
 "No. Druv up in a coupe."
 "Could you make out the rig?"
 "Kin a duck swim? Black-an'-yaller, mud-spattered cab, no number visible; one hoss, a big dapple-gray, lookin' badly winded; driver a sawed-off, mutton-chop whiskers, no livery."
 Hawk started.

"The same outfit from which the girl's body was thrown!" he said to himself. "Hardly a doubt remains. My man and the murderer must be one and the same!"

"You were sure of the man?" he continued, aloud.

"Sure pop, boss. The same oldish swell you once showed me comin' out of the Casino."

"Describe him."
 "Tall as a lamp-post, pussy as a hog's head; black beard, off-color eyes, with a scowl in 'em; short, black hair, bristlin' up like a hog's back; evenin' dress; shirt-front sparkler like a Tammany Hall headlight."

"Good! You must have been close to him."

"Only left my post here once, to foller him inter the hotel. Heard him assigned to Room Eighty-six. Tried to see what name he'd registered. Was cussed by night-clerk an' kicked out by porter what was about to shoulder his traps."

"Traps! He had luggage, then?"
 "Big steamer trunk, two grip-sacks, an' a hat-box."

"Strange, strange! I can't understand that. You then returned to your post?"

"You bet, boss!"
 "And the man has not quitted the hotel since?"

"Not by any front door or winder, boss; an' I'm 'bettin' on it!"

"Nixey, you have done well," said Hawk, dropping some money in the little fellow's hand. "Change your togs to those of a district messenger, and get your breakfast."

"What then, boss?" and the money was pocketed like a flash.

"Report to officer in charge of Gotham Flats, 16 Montauk place, next to top floor, and wait."

The boy jerked his forelock, with a comical scrape of the foot and toss of his box from one shoulder to the other, and sped away like an arrow.

Hawk Heron was familiar with the appointments, employees and internal arrangements of nearly every prominent hotel in New York.

It was the fashionable breakfast hour as he strolled, with admirably-assumed carelessness, into the Brunswick.

Not wishing to even hint the nature of his errand, he did not examine the register, but merely nodded to the clerks and passed on.

"Fourth floor, Room Eighty-six," he said in a low tone to the attendant, as he entered the elevator.

There was no other passenger.

"End of main passage, last room to right," said the attendant, as he landed our hero on the fourth floor, and received a couple on their way down to breakfast.

Hawk had the main passage to himself, though he heard a chambermaid singing at her work in a cross-passage near at hand.

He was about starting back for Room Eighty-six when he noticed that the attendant had inadvertently left open the door leading into the elevator shaft.

He was closing it when a low, guttural exclamation, like an enraged but half-suppressed growl, caused him to look up.

Then he gave an exclamation in his turn, and stood rooted to the spot, his hand on the door, his foot at the edge of the empty shaft's abyss.

Coming directly toward him, with swift, cat-like steps, from the direction of Room Eighty-six, was the very man he sought, though now in fashionable walking-dress!

Not an iota of the description was wanting!

The towering, portly frame, the coal-black beard, mustache and hair, the latter evidently bristling up under his hat, the serpent-like, fiery eyes.

All tallied alike with the many characters in one whom he was seeking—whom he had so longed to meet face to face.

It was this terrible concentration of criminal personalities in one person, springing so unexpectedly before him like a vision of hatred and ferocity, that had paralyzed the detective for an instant.

But he was speedily himself again, and with reason, for the giant was now upon him.

"Dog of a detective!" snarled the latter, as they instantly closed in a life-and-death grapple at the mouth of the shaft. "You have sleuthed me down at last, but it is to your ruin."

"We'll see about that!" gasped Hawk, reliant in his own herculean strength, but feeling as if in a grizzly hug as they swayed and struggled on the giddy verge. "Monster! no criminal ever yet escaped from out my actual clutch."

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the giant, in his low,

deadly way, while tightening his enormous grip. "Foolhardy boy; wouldst try thy callow strength against Count Kotzka the Proboscided?"

Scarcely a moment longer could Hawk Heron withstand that boa-like embrace—that lion-like wrench.

He felt it—knew it. But with despair and anguish at his heart, the indomitable detective's instinct was still uppermost.

"Villain! you then confess your identity?" he panted. "In your personality I have then tracked all those crimes—the crimes of long ago, the foreign forgeries, the murder of Olga and her mother, this morning's attempts on my own life—to their single hideous source?"

"All, all! and a hundred others you dream not of!" hissed the colossus, at last, by an irresistible wrench whirling him from his foothold out over the shaft. "Ha, ha, ha! Fool! idiot! I can afford a confession now—now, with your life in the hollow of my hand! Close your eyes, Hawk Heron! Your hour has struck!"

"Coward!"

"As you please. But hark you, Hawk Heron, the vulture of your bosom emblem (do you remember how I pricked it there in the old, old days?) turns at last upon his falcon foe, to dash him forever from his haughty hight!"

"Monster!"

"Ha, ha, ha! Look your last upon the world, Hawk Heron, for now, now it is done with thee!"

The next instant Hawk felt himself hurled into the depths.

His enemy cast but one glance down the shaft, and then, with a repetition of his low-voiced, ghoul-like chuckle, disappeared.

This awful struggle had taken place so swiftly and quickly that the attention of no one else had been attracted.

Even the chambermaid's song in the adjoining passage had proceeded uninterruptedly.

Hawk heard it still from where he desperately hung down in the shaft, after clutching by a lucky chance the wire door leading out into the floor directly below, and his fancy invested its careless merriment with a mocking, derisive tone.

Then a fresh horror threatened.

He was still breathless and hardly able to maintain his clinging grip on the door, when he heard the slightly rumbling sound of the ascending elevator.

Too weak to spring for the rising wire rope, too exhausted even to call out for assistance, he must, unless relieved, inevitably be crushed to death!

"Heaven help me for a final effort!" he groaned, "or that scourge of humanity may pursue his red career unchecked to the very end."

Fortunately, his last effort was successful.

He managed to get his toes upon the ledge, while maintaining a side-hold with his left hand, and in this new position slid back the door with his right.

Just as he stepped forth in safety, the elevator, which would else have ground him to death, shot up past the opening with resistless force.

"Not half a minute has elapsed since our struggle!" muttered our hero, rushing toward a staircase which he knew to be the only one communicating with Room Eighty-six on the floor above. "The villain hasn't had time to escape by the staircase. He must have returned to his room."

Up he started, three steps at a time, and with the greed of vengeance in his heart.

Still, to make assurance doubly sure, he paused to question the singing chambermaid in the intersecting passage above.

"Lawk, sir! there's no one uses the staircases nowadays, with the elevator so convenient!" was the girl's response to his first query.

"Would you have noted any one going toward yonder staircase within the last three minutes?"

"Indeed, I would, sir! Not a soul has passed along this passage for a good hour, and there's none other by which the staircases could be got to."

Feeling sure that she was not deceiving him, Hawk thanked her, and turned into the main passage.

It was wholly deserted.

"At last!" he said to himself, drawing a long breath.

Passing, not without a shudder, the opening in the shaft, he marched straight to the door of Room Eighty-six.

His teeth were clinched, his glance like the glint of a bayonet, his grip locked like a vise on the butt of a derring in his right-hand trowsers pocket.

He paused an instant outside the door. Some one was stirring within, and a husky voice, which he thought familiar, was humming a surly air.

"Villain! it is my turn now!" shouted the detective, bursting into the room, pistol in hand. "Surrender this instant, or—or—"

The words died on his lips, and he stood rooted to the floor.

The sole occupant of the room had suddenly turned from his half-completed toilet before the looking-glass, apparently no less astounded than Hawk himself.

An enormously tall and stout man, it is true, but a thoroughly Anglo-Saxon blonde, with short, tumbled yellow hair, neutral-tinted eyes, and a rather careless, good-humored, beardless face, though now, naturally enough, a trifle startled and indignant.

"What the deuce does this mean?" he exclaimed. "Only a pistol, eh? But where's your bowie-knife and tomahawk, you know?"

Heron pocketed his weapon mechanically, and began stammering an apology.

"Oh, don't mention it, since it's doubtless a mere custom of the blasted country, you know!" coolly interrupted the stranger, resuming his toilet. "Of course, you're a lunatic."

"But I'm nothing of the sort—I'm only the victim of an infernal mistake!" cried Hawk, while secretly admiring the other's coolness. "I apologize with all my heart, and my name is Hawk Heron, at your service."

The stranger suddenly dropped his brush and comb, and stretched out both his hands in the most cordial manner.

"What! you don't say so?" he exclaimed. "Why, my dear boy, I am delighted to meet you!"

"Can it be possible?" stammered Hawk, though now with a glimmering of the truth.

"Really, you know!"

"Your name?"

"Jack Blithers, of Scotland Yard, London, at your service, my boy!"

"The deuce! I might have known you by your photograph."

Then Hawk returned Blithers's greeting with interest, and at once plunged into his story of explanation, which the other seemed to hear with unaffected astonishment.

CHAPTER IV.

FORMING AND VANISHING LINKS.

"WELL, my boy, this is simply astonishing—a-s-t-o-n-i-s-h-i-n-g!"

Such was Mr. Blithers's comment at the conclusion of Hawk's story.

"It beats anything in the old country no end, you know!" he went on, while dusting off his coat. "But, of course, the big rascal couldn't have come out of this room."

"Of course not," said Hawk. "And, barring size and shape, you don't resemble him in the least."

"Thanks; I should hope not."

"Oh, I meant no offense! But where in thunder could he have come from or vanished to?"

"How should I know? But I'll tell you what, my boy. I'll be down in five minutes, and we can talk the matter over while you are breakfasting with me."

Hawk accepted the invitation, though he had already breakfasted, and then made an excuse to precede Mr. Blithers down-stairs.

His first care was to inspect the register.

"John H. Blithers, Scotland Yard, London," broadly decorated the line that was filled out by the assignment to Room Eighty-six.

Hawk did not essay to question the clerks, but sought out the head porter, whom he knew to be on duty from midnight to noon.

"When did Eighty-six arrive?" he queried, slipping him a fee.

"It's Barnum's escaped giant, Eighty-six is, sure!" said the porter, with a grin. "He was here soon after daylight, in a coupe, wid a raw-boned gray horse, frish from the steamer."

"What luggage?"

"A howlin' big trunk, two valises an' a leather hat-box, your honor."

"Any particular incident in connection with the arrival?"

"Divil a bit, save that I hustled out a spalpeen of a bootblack that was thyrin' to read what the towerin' gentleman wrote in the register."

"Was the gentleman dark or fair?"

"Be gob, an' I couldn't say, sor, as his mug was muffled out of sight the minute after he got under the gas-lights, an' I was, moreover, busy wid the traps."

"Did you recognize the driver of the coupe?"

"Only to recognize him as an utter stranger, your honor. An under-sized mon, wid a pair of thim murtherin' British mutton-chop whiskers, an' divil of a livery or brass button."

"Thanks. Pray, say nothing of my inquiries."

"Divil a word, your honor."

Hawk strolled out to the vestibule of the main entrance.

"Strange, strange!" he muttered, glancing about him. "Could the villain whom Nixey described as entering here have effected a change while passing through this vestibule, and then appeared at the desk as blonde, beardless Mr. Blithers, of Scotland Yard? Hardly possible! And yet the porter corroborates Nixey in every other particular to a dot. I can't make it out! For once in my life, I am teetotally, irredeemably mixed up!"

Here a bell-boy brought word that Mr. Blithers was waiting.

If Hawk had retained a suspicion of there being any mysterious connection between his many-sided criminal, whom he had heretofore

known as simply Max Steinman, forger and villain at large, and this Mr. Jack Blithers, of Scotland Yard, London, the suspicion speedily disappeared before the latter's frank, genial and engaging manner at breakfast.

"So you really think that our original fugitive, Max Steinman, and the perpetrator of this morning's ghastly crimes, are one and the same?" said Blithers, after they had exchanged confidences pretty generally.

"There's nothing else to think," said Hawk. "Can you think otherwise after all I have told you?"

"No. But then the fellow must be a regular prodigy of wickedness."

"An inspired monster!"

"What do you propose?"

"You first."

Mr. Blithers smiled contentedly.

"Well, Heron," said he, "it's my opinion that sleuth-hounds work as well in couples as singly. What's yours?"

"This," said Hawk, extending his shapely but muscular palm.

"It's a go!" cried Blithers, and he struck palms over the unexpressed understanding. "We're together in this hunt to the bitter end. Eh?"

"Done!"

"Good enough! And look you, my boy. I like your style so demnition well that we'll top off with just one more bottle."

Hawk assented; and, when the glasses had been refilled, Blithers threw some papers on the table.

"Here's my credentials from Scotland Yard," said he. "Pray, throw your eye over 'em before I take 'em down to your Head-quarters."

Hawk did so with apparent carelessness, but really with a scrutiny that let nothing escape.

He was, moreover, familiar with the signatures of the London officials appended to the documents, which he found to be flawless in every particular.

"Now, I'm going direct to Head-quarters," said Blithers, receiving back the papers, "and after that I shall be privately engaged till this evening. Can you accompany me?"

"No; it is already late, and I must be at the inquest. *Au revoir* till, say, to-morrow morning."

With this understanding, they separated.

Hawk would have been considerably enlightened could he have seen the exulting smile with which "Jack Blithers" looked after his retreating form.

"So, my innocent!" muttered that worthy, between his clinched teeth; "I have hoodwinked you completely. Ha, ha, ha! Max Steinman, forger, Count Kotzka, the Nihilist leader, Adolphe Delancourt, the remover of the *pseudo* widow Ashcombe and her daughter, etc., etc., in the person of bluff Jack Blithers, will be your confidant, and if he doesn't get the better of you it will be his own fault."

In the mean time, what had become of the true Jack Blithers, whom this protean villain was personating so cleverly?

Alas! this was a new secret that had been locked up in that terrible breast since early morning of that very day, and the sole witness to which was the poor murdered body of the real Scotland Yard detective, lying under water off the string-piece of the North river steamship dock at which he had landed only to meet his death-stroke.

When Hawk reached the Gotham Flats entrance, after a considerable detention, two policemen were there keeping back the crowd, and an undertaker's wagon stood at the curb.

"Is the inquest in progress?" asked the detective.

"Not yet," said the officer addressed. "The physicians are examining the bodies, and three undertaker's men have just gone up with ice-boxes."

Here Mr. Schmidt came out of the passage, followed by Nixey, now as a smartly-uniformed district messenger boy.

Tears were still in the honest old German's eyes.

"Oh, Boss Heron!" whispered Nixey, with a grin. "You orter have see'd one of the undertaker's coves as went up."

"Why?"

"The rummiest old cove you ever see. Jest as tall an' pussy as the big duck I spotted for you at the Brunswick, only slouchy, an' redder in the mug than a b'iled crab."

Hawk was vaguely interested.

"One of the undertaker's men, say you?"

"Yes."

"Room in front there!" at this juncture called out a policeman, on guard back in the passage at the foot of the stairs. "Here comes one of the undertaker chaps with a big load."

They all drew back from the entrance as a roughly-clad man of gigantic frame emerged, shouldering a large empty tub for stowing ice.

As this man caught sight of Hawk Heron, he let his burden fall with a crash, and then started back in the doorway with an exclamation.

"Mein Gott!" screamed the old German, in amazement; "the man of the theater—the man of the staircase—Olga's abductor!"

"Thunder and lightning!" shouted Hawk; "the man that hurled me from the train—the

man that gave me the slip in the tenement-house passage!"

And he sprung like a wolf at the big man's throat.

CHAPTER V.

BAFFLED AGAIN.

"HELP! robbery! assassination! Zey would murder me!"

Such was the alarm raised by the gigantic undertaker's assistant as Hawk Heron sprung at his throat, and he raised his powerful arms to defend himself.

It was answered by two men, the driver of the undertaker's wagon and another policeman, who, at the same moment, issued from the doorway.

Neither was acquainted with Hawk, whose action was therefore wholly incomprehensible to them, and they at once precipitated themselves upon him.

"Don't be fools!" cried Hawk, from the midst of the wild struggle in which all four were straightway mixed up. "This man is a mysterious villain, and I am a detective officer! Ha! curse you both! I got that through your meddling!"

At the last words, he reeled back, faint and dizzy, from a random blow in the chest from the giant's sledge-hammer fist, while the policeman and his companion came to a dumfounded pause.

Then the colossus, likewise flooring old Schmidt, who was coming to Hawk's assistance, and shaking off Nixey, who had grasped the tail of his blouse, leaped into the undertaker's wagon with a panther-like bound, gathered up the reins, and lashed the horse into a run.

Though the worst sufferer, Hawk was the first to recover.

"After him!" he shouted. "It is doubtless the murderer himself!" And he shot off like a greyhound in pursuit, followed by the rest.

Hawk Heron had never met his match as a runner, even among the most noted professionals.

Notwithstanding that the horse was a good one, and lashed to its utmost, he held his own in the chase, and soon distanced the other pursuers.

At last, after momentarily losing sight of the fugitive equipage, at a sharp turn, he once more saw it dashing away, but empty and without guidance.

At the same instant the banging of a street-door on the right indicated that the fugitive might have disappeared behind it.

The house was one of a block of small, mean-looking, three-story-and-basement dwellings, in a narrow, out-of-the-way little street, of unenviable reputation, known as Melton place.

It was only after clamoring at the door for a long time, and after many protests on the part of an angry but melodious feminine voice from within, that our hero was finally admitted into this house.

Then, as he recognized the owner of the melodious voice, he sprung into the passage, and grasped her wrist.

"Ha!" he exclaimed, "my demure warning-giver of the elevated railroad—my young lady of the lost basket!"

She stared at him with well-simulated astonishment.

"Come, come!" cried Hawk; "where you are the 'sweet Adolphe' cannot be far away. I must search the house this instant."

"As you choose," said the young woman, collectedly. "It is empty, however, save the basement, which I occupy, as janitress."

She was possessed of a remarkable and even commanding beauty, which by this time had impressed the detective strongly.

Under other circumstances he might have thought it a case of love at first sight, and the fact that she returned his searching gaze with a look in which annoyance had given way to interest would have somewhat flattered his self-esteem at least.

"I must do my duty, miss," said he, half apologetically.

She stepped aside, with a gesture toward the staircase.

He hesitated.

"I beg you to tell me your name?" said he.

"Clarisse Letours."

"A beautiful name!"

She smiled coquettishly, and then grew suddenly grave.

"I honestly dislike flattery, sir," said she, simply. "But, since you are so courteous, I shall conceal nothing."

"Thank you!"

"Just before you rung the bell, I did hear some one burst into this house, like one pursued, and run up-stairs."

"Where were you?"

"In my basement rooms. I thought it might be a thief, and you an accomplice."

"But how could he have got in?"

"Heaven only knows. Perhaps by a skeleton key. This is an evil neighborhood, infested by bad people."

"I am aware of that. Anything else?"

"Yes; all the rooms above the basement

floor, with one exception, are vacant and unfurnished. There is a man in that room now, but not the one you seek."

As she hesitated, a suspicious frown crossed the detective's face.

"Explain!" said he, peremptorily.

"Oh, sir!—but, yes, I will tell you all. Know, then, that I make a little money by occasionally hiring out that room by the day. At present there is a stranger there awaiting the visit of some other man, perhaps a criminal."

"Good! I shall interview him."

But, as he started toward the staircase, she intercepted him with a gesture of genuine solicitude.

"Oh, sir, do not intrude upon this stranger, I beseech you!" she exclaimed. "He is so big, so formidable-looking."

Hawk's suspicions augmented.

"Excuse me, but big men are just in my line at present," said he, thrusting her aside. "And if the sweet Adolphe chances to be in hiding up yonder—"

He checked himself as a door above was heard to open, followed by a surly exclamation, as of extreme impatience, and then a heavy descending step.

Clarisse started forward, as if to give warning, but Hawk's left arm grasped her as if in a vise, while one hand closed over her lips and the other produced his revolver.

"Traitor! Cockatrice!" he hissed, drawing her into the darkest corner of the passage, "this is your Adolphe—the fugitive villain I seek!"

But when the man descending the stairs came into view, Hawk started back in dismay.

"Blithers—Jack Blithers!" he exclaimed.

"The deuce!" cried Blithers, for he indeed it was. "Here's a rum go. What are you doing here, my boy?"

"You owe me the first explanation, since I spoke first," said Hawk, slipping his weapon out of sight, and fastening his eyes on the other's florid face.

"Ha, ha, ha! with all my heart!" cried Blithers, with his fat, hearty laugh. "I confess I was a little evasive with you when we separated a few hours ago. My real engagement was to meet and confer with one Manchester Tibbs, an old English professional, in Mistress Letours's little snuggerly up-stairs, in regard to a side case I'm on, you know. Precious little good it has done me, by the way!" he added, turning half-angrily toward Clarisse, who seemed agreeably astonished at the turn affairs had taken. "How now, young mistress? No signal as yet, such as I advised you of."

Before she could answer, there came the light, pattering sound of some small pebbles thrown against the dusty transom panes.

"Tibbs at last!" muttered Blithers, frowning.

"Open to him, mistress, that I may rebuke his tardiness as it deserves."

Clarisse opened the street door.

Then, as if in full confirmation of what Blithers had been saying, there skulked furtively up the steps from out the gathering dusk of the street a shambling, villainous figure, that seemed a hideous incarnation of Old World squalor, depravity and crime.

The rascal looked up expectantly, but Blithers at once opened upon him with such a tirade of abuse, in the thieves' Latin that was equally familiar to Hawk, that he speedily skulked back into the obscurity, with a half-scared, half-sullen look on his hang-dog features, and was seen no more.

"My trouble and time for my pains, that's all," said Blithers, with a resumption of his broad good-humor as he retreated into the passage, closing the door. "Now, old fellow, it's your turn. What the deuce brought you here?"

Hawk's confidence in the other had by this time been fully restored, if, indeed, it had undergone any real diminution at all. In a few words he told his story, frankly and succinctly.

"Why, I heard the racket that your fugitive must have made in breaking into the house here!" exclaimed Blithers, when he had finished his recital. "The steps sounded as if he were making tracks somewhere below. Speak, mistress. Is there any secret egress he might have availed himself of?"

Clarisse changed countenance and hesitated.

Blithers eyed her keenly, and a hard, savage look came into his face.

"Quick! out with it!" and he made a significant gesture.

"Oh, I'll speak truth, but don't try to bully me!" said the girl defiantly. "You can't scare me, big as you are. I'll speak, but it will be to please *him*, not you." And her color flashed back as she looked at Hawk.

"Speak, then, I pray you, Clarisse," said the younger man, who had been silently attentive.

"There is a secret passage, then," said she.

"It is a sort of tunnel going out from the coal-hole under the street. It passes under a man-hole, in among the gas and water-pipes, and then on and on, the Lord only knows where, perhaps as far down as the rocks with the squatters' shanties on top of 'em, for all I know. This house, I've been told, was once occupied by a band of counterfeiters."

"Oho!"

"Yes; and whether or not your fugitive knew

of this secret passage, you can guess for yourselves. You can explore it now, if you choose."

"That we do choose!" cried Blithers heartily, and he linked his arm in Hawk's. "Come, my boy; I'm with you in this, if you say so."

"With all my heart," said Hawk, and they followed Clarisse, who tripped before them down the basement stairs for the purpose of obtaining lights. "But look that you be on your guard!" And he lowered his voice.

"What! of the girl?"

"Yes; I know her to be the friend, perhaps an accomplice, of the villain I seek."

"The deuce! Why, she is actually soft upon you, you dog!" And Blithers pressed the arm he clasped, with a knowing chuckle.

"Pshaw! she's a deep one. However, be that as it may, the truth is as I say."

"I can hardly believe it; but here we are."

Clarisse, who had disappeared into the front basement room, now reappeared with three lighted candles. She gave one to each man, reserving the third for herself, and then guided them down into the sub-cellar.

At last they stood at the edge of the coal-hole, a low-vaulted space directly under the front area and, save for the glimmering rays of the candles, as dark as a cat's mouth.

"Yonder's the entrance," said she.

She held her candle high over her head, and indicated a dismal-looking arched opening in the opposite wall.

"Shall I go first?" asked Blithers, advancing a step.

"No," said Hawk, interposing, candle in one hand, pistol in the other. "It's my game that's afoot, and I must lead. Come on!"

He was stooping to enter the tunnel, when he heard a deep, hollow groan, accompanied by what seemed the rattling of a chain, and apparently issuing from the heart of the solid masonry to the left.

Blithers also heard the sounds, and, as they both started back, they observed a broken beam of light struggling through a narrow fissure in the wall.

Just then, however, Clarisse darted past them, throwing herself against the wall with all her force.

There was heard a sharp click, as of the catching of a spring lock, and the fissure disappeared.

"A plague on those water pipes!" she ejaculated. "Sometimes they keep me from sleeping with their groaning and rattling."

The two men abstained from comment, and at once entered the tunnel, Hawk leading the way, and Clarisse peering after them from the entrance, candle in hand.

The secret passageway was miserably constructed, and the footing was made slippery and insecure by many inequalities.

Blithers soon began to grumble while stumbling along after his companion.

"Cheer up!" Hawk called back, encouragingly. "We must be approaching the man-hole. Clarisse spoke of."

"What of that?" growled the other. "However, keep your eyes peeled, for this is a dangerous place, and—Ha!"

The startled exclamation was followed by an oath and a groan, accompanied by the sudden extinction of his candle and a dull thud, as of a heavy blow being struck and received.

Then came a shot, and, before Hawk could turn, his candle was snuffed out by a bullet whistling past his ear.

"Save yourself, Hawk!" called out Blithers's voice faintly, while the heavy thuds and a sound of scuffling continued in the darkness. "Oh, to be thus pounded to death without even seeing your assailant's face! Ah!"

There was a final groan, the blows ceased, and all was silent.

Alert and listening, with every nerve strung to the highest tension, Hawk fired a shot from his revolver into the air, for the sake of the brief illumination the flash might afford him.

The report rung and re-echoed through the tunnel, but the flash only seemed to dance against a solid wall of blackness.

Then, just as the flash expired, he suddenly felt himself seized in a grasp of steel, and hurried forward helplessly, while a well-known hideous voice was in his ear.

"Oh, you enemy, you enemy! and now mine at last, mine at last!" it hissed and chuckled, while he could feel the arch villain's breath, like the fiery blast of a moral sirocco, on his cheek. "You fear, you are unnerved at last! The hunted vulture turns upon his falcon foe, and holds him, awe-struck and quivering, in his avenging clutch!"

"You're a liar!" the detective found breath to gasp out defiantly. "No, fiend—monster in many shapes that you are—the Providence that hath protected and guided me thus far will not abandon me now! Though helpless and in your power, Hawk Heron, the falcon of detectives, is not destined to succumb to that vulture of crime, Count Kotzka, the Proscribed—no, though he assume a hundred other baffling shapes to elude the fell retributive swoop!"

He could feel an increase of that grateful upper air upon his face as he spoke. The shaft of the man-hole was near.

But at this instant his invisible foe hurled him down upon his back.

Steely, talon-like fingers were at his throat, a mighty knee upon his breast, and then he could feel the cold muzzle of a revolver pressed against his forehead.

"Yes, you speak truly!" snarled the voice. "I am that Count Kotzka the Proscribed, that many in one, and you are at my mercy! Mercy! Ha, ha, ha! Such a word coupled with such a name! The pity-beseeching victim in the tiger's grasp!"

"Liar again!" gaspingly retorted the detective. "Dog! I to plead for pity, and from such a person as you?"

His dauntlessness seemed to rouse the ruffian to the pitch of frenzy.

"Ha! are you of adamant? is there no way of striking terror to your heart?" he roared in the darkness, fairly gnashing his teeth. "I have quieted the Englishman, your fool of a companion; now it is your turn!" Click, click sounded the cocking of the revolver. "Speak! grovel for mercy, swear to give over your ruthless pursuit, or—"

"Never!" was the defiant reply.

Then, just in the nick of time, he wrenched his head to one side as the weapon was discharged and the bullet but grazed his ear.

Then, as he shook himself partly free, an encouraging cry, accompanied by ringing blows, as of an iron implement being pounded against a metallic plate, resounded from far overhead.

"Help, help!" shouted Hawk, again almost overmastered by his invisible assailant.

Here the cap of the man-hole was pried to one side, and Nixey's characteristic voice shouted down:

"Hold your own for just a minute more, Boss Heron! Here's the cops, with a ladder and a lantern!"

With a hoarse, gnashing growl, like that of a baffled wild beast, Hawk's antagonist suddenly dashed him to one side, and darted away amid the darkness of the passage.

Breathless, but not seriously injured, Hawk lost no time in availing himself of the ladder that was let down from above.

On emerging, he explained the situation in a few words to two policemen and the faithful lad, who were grouped about the man-hole.

"But Blithers—my poor friend Blithers—he may have been murdered outright!" exclaimed the detective. "Never mind the fugitive now. He is doubtless ere this far beyond reach. Think only of Blithers!"

He was directing one policeman to descend into the tunnel with a lantern, while the others should enter it by way of the house, when the door of the latter opened, and, to the astonishment of all, Clarisse came out to say that Blithers had made his way back into the building, where he was then engaged in bathing some wounds on the neck which he had received from some blunt instrument.

Rejoicing to hear that his companion had come off so easily, Hawk sent word by Clarisse that he would keep the appointment made for the following morning.

He then hurried away with Nixey, leaving the policemen to close up the man-hole.

"How did you chance to put in such a timely appearance?" asked Hawk.

"Easy enough, boss," was the reply. "After seeing you go into that house, which I knowed fur a bad 'un, I skipped back to the Gotham, an' got a couple of cops, just on the speculation of your havin' stepped into a trap."

"Aha! And then?"

"You see, I already knowed that ere passage, boss. It opens back on the rocks, where I used to travel with the Short Tail Gang."

"Oho!"

"Yes, boss, an' I was fly also to the man-hole communication. Well, me an' the cops chanced along in the nick of time with the lantern and ladder. That's all, boss, an' then—But gosh a'mighty! catch on to the phantom!"

He started back as he spoke, as did Hawk also, and with reason.

Out of the mouth of a dark alley-way, which they were crossing, a form had suddenly risen before them in the light of a near street-lamp, so ghastly and repulsive in its criminal and vicious suggestions as to momentarily stagger them.

"Ah! it is Blithers's man, Manchester Tibbs," said Hawk, quickly recovering himself on making the recognition.

The ruffian put his finger to his lips and gave a hyena-like chuckle.

"Hi say, mister," said he, "wot's it worth to you, if hi'd giv you a pint or two ag'in' that big bloke wot was hin the 'allway with you a while ago?"

"You mean Blithers?" said Hawk, in surprise. "Blithers has proved himself my friend, and a staunch one. There's nothing against Blithers."

"Oho! there hain't, eh? I say, guv'nor, jess plank the price of a week's grub an' lodgin' across my 'and, wull yer? an' hi'll let you hinto a pint or two ag'in' that 'ere same Blithers, as you call him, wot'll raise the hair clean hoff your scalp."

As he held out his grimy paw half-expect-

antly, his smile was like that of a fiend or ghoul.

"Begone!" exclaimed Hawk, threateningly. "Pah!"

A hideous change, a change from eagerness to hatred and despair, came over the ruffian's face. Then, with a low, deadly sort of laugh, he vanished as mysteriously as he had appeared.

"Come!" said Hawk, hurrying his little companion along with him. "The very recollection of that fellow is like a nightmare."

CHAPTER VI.

CLARISSE.

CLARISSE LETOURS had not greatly exaggerated the *pseudo* Jack Blithers's injuries, though of course the reader will have divined that he had only come by them in his treacherous encounter with Hawk Heron amid the darkness of the subterranean passage.

That chameleon-like criminal was finishing the dressing of his bruises and the readjustment of his present disguise, when Clarisse returned to the basement apartments of the dingy little house in Melton place.

"So!" said he, looking up with a sort of growl; "does that infernal detective still seem unsuspecting of my identity with Count Kotzka, Adolphe and the rest?"

"He sent word that he would keep his appointment with you to-morrow."

"Is that all?"

"He hurried off apparently satisfied, after expressing his sympathy with your injuries."

"Curse him! I would not mind them if I had either succeeded in killing him or forcing him to an oath of neutrality. However, his time will come!"

Here Kotzka strode from the semi-dark kitchen, in which this colloquy had taken place, to the front room, which answered for the young woman's bed-chamber, where a bright light was burning, and confronted Clarisse with a stern countenance.

"Now, Clarisse," said he, harshly, "I have several explanations to demand of you."

She returned his forbidding look with a half-contemptuous gaze.

"So have I of you," she retorted, quietly. "But do you proceed first."

He burst into a derisive laugh, but at the same time eyed her with a certain uneasiness.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he chuckled. "You to demand explanations of me, your master! Come, that is good!"

The angry color leaped into her cheeks and her eyes flashed.

"You are forgetful," said she, with enforced coldness. "I have forbidden that word 'master' when we are alone."

"Oho! Well, then, I shall substitute 'uncle,' as of old, if you prefer it."

"Neither that again, I repeat to you, Count Kotzka!" she exclaimed, stamping her foot. "You know that, since I have discovered your assumed relationship to be false, I have also interdicted that word."

"Indeed!"

"Ay, sir! Henceforth, our connection is solely political, so far as the oath of the Nihilist Brotherhood binds us, and no more."

"Still, Clarisse—"

"Will you go on with what you were about to say, or shall I take the initiative?"

"Tut, tut! keep your temper. Yes, I will continue. In the first place, your carelessness in leaving the door ajar at the mouth of the tunnel well-nigh compromised our secret of the imbecile old baron's captivity."

"I acknowledge the fault. It shall not occur again."

"That is well, especially as no great harm can come of the hint."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, if it only serve to tempt Hawk Heron into the underground passage once more, I shall take care that it shall be to his death or his renunciation of his pursuit of me."

"Ah! Well, sir, what else?"

"You coddle and make too much of the old prisoner down yonder. I have noticed this repeatedly during my recent visits to his cell. Had he been more severely treated, we might have got rid of him long ago."

"Pass on to something else. No change shall be made in that quarter."

"Girl! would you dare—"

"Ay, any and everything in the cause of humanity, as you know! It is now many years since the unfortunate Baron Tauchnitz, having deservedly incurred the resentment of our Brotherhood, was submitted to my charge, when I was yet a mere child in years, though prematurely a woman in the harsh wisdom of the world. I have carried him from prison-house to prison-house, from hiding-place to hiding-place, while following your roving revolutionary mission throughout Europe and America, as the Brotherhood may have ordered. Speak! Have I or have I not acquitted myself of the arduous task with courage and discretion?"

"You have," was the reluctant reply. "There is no gainsaying that."

"Then forget not that I only assumed the task on condition that I should be permitted to treat the poor, helpless old man with as much

kindness and tenderness as if he were my own father."

Kotzka started, and gave her a peculiar look. "Your own father?" he repeated.

"Yes."

"Would you thus trifle with the sacred name that belonged to him alone, Armand Letours, your martyred sire, who, dying in Siberian exile—"

"Yes, yes; and left me the daughter of the Brotherhood, and in your special and fostering care!" she interrupted, half-bitterly. "Oh, I am not repining at my fate! The cause of the Brotherhood is just and a sacred one to live and die in, though I cannot thank it for blending my poor fortunes with such as yours, blood-stained and desperate as they are."

He made an angry gesture, and would have replied, but that she interrupted him afresh.

"No more of the old captive, then," she said. "If you would reproach me with aught else, speak on."

"There is one other thing," said Kotzka, controlling himself. "It refers to this Hawk Heron."

"So; what of him?"

"I observed you narrowly while with him."

"Indeed!"

"You paled when he passed, unsuspectingly, into the tunnel."

"What of it?"

"Your face was radiant when you knew he had escaped the trap I was preparing for him."

"What of that?"

Kotzka suddenly gave way to an ungovernable bit of fury.

"Girl! woman!" he exclaimed; "should you—knowing this man to be sleuthing me down in the interests of the sworn enemies of our sacred Brotherhood—"

"I know him to be doing nothing of the sort."

"Do not madden me with interruptions," continued Kotzka, savagely. "I say he is the secret agent of the Russian representative in this city, howsoever he may mask his pursuit of me upon other grounds. I shall prove this to you, as well as to the Brotherhood. And, after being aware of this fact, if you should dare to cherish a tender sentiment for this Hawk Heron, I warn you to beware."

The color rushed to the girl's temples, and then she burst into a scornful laugh.

"That for your solicitude where my private feelings are concerned!" said she, snapping her thumb and finger in her enraged companion's face. "Is that all—are you through now?"

Kotzka again controlled himself with an effort.

"Yes, for the present," said he, sullenly.

"Now it is my turn," said Clarisse, eying him with a dauntless and stern expression.

"Proceed."

"I have just read the evening newspaper account of the terrible double tragedy in the Gotham Flats."

"I explained to you early this morning my innocent connection with it, when I gave you the basket containing the wax-work emblem."

"Ay; but truly?"

"On my honor!"

"Ay; but on your oath of affiliation, likewise?"

Kotzka turned pale, but she was scrutinizing his face relentlessly, so he drew a long breath, and answered, resolutely:

"Yes; by my oath of affiliation, I swear it!"

"Enough. I dare not doubt you further. You were simply guilty of abducting the girl in the interests of the Brotherhood?"

"Of nothing else, upon my oath!"

"And you found her lying senseless by the form of her mother, whom some one else had already murdered?"

"Have I not already told you so? The girl afterward died on my hands, or seemed to lapse into death."

"And the wax emblem?"

"I saw it hanging in the murdered widow's room. It not only identified her past with mine, but recalled the days when I was the friend and mentor of this man, this Hawk Heron, who is now pursuing me. Hence, I carried it away."

"Who could have murdered Mrs. Ashcombe?"

"How should I know?"

"But you were the agent of our Brotherhood, and you have admitted that it was the Brotherhood's interest to silence her, as well as obtain possession of the daughter."

"True; and chance—accident—has interposed in our favor."

Clarisse drew a long breath.

"You would not dare trifle with that dread oath," said she, in a low voice. "I must needs believe you."

"You can do so safely."

"And that is well for you, Kotzka."

"What do you mean?"

"Simply this: Close and paternal as have been your relations toward me since my earliest recollections—much as I know you to have stained your soul with crime and blood in the interests of our glorious Brotherhood, whose cause is that of liberty and humanity—did I suspect you to have been the murderer of that poor woman and her daughter, I would without an instant's hesitation aid this Falcon Detective in

his righteous quest, and give you up to the hangman on the spot!"

Kotzka with difficulty repressed a shudder, but he managed to say with moody calmness:

"It is, however, as I have asserted. And I shall eventually prove to the Brotherhood's satisfaction, that Hawk Heron is in reality a Russian secret agent, who has merely taken up this pursuit of me as a cover to bring about the disruption of our Order here in this country."

"But, as Max Steinman, the London forger of European securities—"

"All in the interest of the Brotherhood, recollect!"

"Yes, yes; but it was still in that capacity that you were already the object of Hawk Heron's pursuit before the tragedy of this morning."

"True! and the political nature of those forgeries proves him to be instigated by foreign political, as well as ordinary detective, employment."

"I don't know that."

"Clarisse, I swear it, by the same terrible oath that you have already evoked!"

"Ah!"

"Yes, and also that he seeks to fasten this additional crime upon me to the same political end!"

"All this on your oath of affiliation?"

"All, all! and a hundred times reiterated, were it necessary."

"Enough, I believe you. Now, are you sure of baffling Heron?"

"How can you doubt it, with my genius for disguises, my familiarity with numerous secret resorts, my boundless command of money, and, lastly but mostly, with the unquestioning devotion of our entire Brotherhood at my back?"

"True; he must be even more than human to outwit you."

"He cannot—it is impossible!" cried Kotzka, exultantly.

"This last disguise of the Scotland Yard detective seems to stand you in good stead."

"I rely on it more than anything else."

"Where is the man you are personating?"

A deadly and impassible look came into Kotzka's face.

"Question me not, Clarisse," said he. "He is—gone!"

Clarisse shuddered, she scarcely knew why.

"You have not told me," said she, after a pause, "in what way the poor murdered widow and her daughter stood between the Brotherhood and its aims?"

"Nor shall I tell you now," said Kotzka, in a deep and impressive voice. "See to it that you, in your turn, remember your oath of affiliation in that Order of which I am the august Master!"

The proud girl bent her head submissively, as if under a merited rebuke.

"One question more," she murmured.

"Name it."

"Was the murdered Mrs. Ashcombe a widow in reality?"

Kotzka started, and gave her a swift, searching look.

"She seems to have thought or called herself such, at all events," he said. "Is not that enough?"

"Perhaps so; but then, since reading of her tragic fate, and the mystery that seems to have surrounded her life, I cannot help unaccountably coupling that woman with—"

"With whom?"

"With our imbecile life-prisoner—with the Baron Tauchnitz. He was rumored, I remember, to have had family connections in Hungary—the mystery was never wholly cleared up, and—"

Kotzka interrupted her with an outburst of mingled wrath and derision.

"Preposterous! You have been misled!" he exclaimed. "Think no more of such folly!"

She again bent her head.

"I shall strive to obey you," said she. "Gratify my curiosity on one other point."

"Proceed."

"Twice to-day you have had Hawk Heron's life in your hands—yes, thrice, if I include the elevated railroad incident—and—"

"And yet I spared him? This is what you can't understand, eh?"

"Yes."

"Well, I cannot explain myself more fully than to repeat that I was the friend and mentor of his youth in other days and other climes. I prefer not to destroy him until it shall be absolutely forced upon me."

Clarisse's face brightened.

"But," he continued, observing her narrowly, "such a result will doubtless be forced upon me sooner or later."

Her face clouded again, but he abstained from comment.

Kotzka now prepared to depart.

"Work is still before me to-night," said he, "work at which you may assist."

She looked up quickly.

"It concerns Olga Ashcombe," he continued. "What! the dead young girl?"

He bent forward, and whispered in her ear.

Clarisse started back in supreme astonishment.

"Say you so?" she exclaimed. "I will second you to the extent of my power."

"I thought so," said Kotzka, smiling.

After giving Clarisse a few more whispered instructions, he took his departure.

CHAPTER VII.

A MOMENTOUS REVELATION.

HAWK was just in time to give his testimony before the coroner's jury.

As it only embraced what he had actually seen with regard to the tragedy, the reader can judge how little it availed toward identifying the murderer.

Mr. Schmidt and the old charwoman, the only other witnesses, had already given their testimony, to no better effect.

The verdict was accordingly a mere reflection of the ignorance evolved, and, for the time being, the terrible crime remained shrouded in impenetrable mystery.

The undertaker's duties had already been performed. The coffined bodies of the victims lay upon trestles side by side in the front apartment of the humble suite.

Hawk was one of the last that lingered after the verdict had been declared.

He was also about to take his departure, when his arm was touched significantly by a young man who had accompanied the coroner and his assistant, and had aided in the *post-mortem* examination. "Pray, wait till we are absolutely alone, sir," said the young man. "I have a remarkable revelation to make."

Hawk looked at him in surprise. By the rays of a single lamp that stood on the mantle-piece, he appeared to be a prepossessing young man, of twenty-five or six, decently clad, but with a haggard and careworn look.

Sobs proceeded from an adjoining room, in which the grief-stricken old music-master had taken refuge.

"Help me to get rid of Mr. Schmidt," continued the young man, in a whisper. "It is best that what I must tell you should be secret from even him, at least for the present."

Equally impressed and puzzled, Hawk nodded his assent.

The young man passed into the adjoining room, and returned leading in the old man, who was finally persuaded to retire to his own apartments on the floor above, on receiving an assurance that strict watch and guard should be kept in the chamber of death.

"Who are you, sir?" asked the detective, when alone with the young man.

"Ralph Seagrave, a simple medical student, and an occasional assistant of the coroner's physician," was the quiet reply. "But I am also something more. Come here!"

He took the lamp, and, passing to the head of one of the coffins, reverently unveiled the marble face of the occupant.

It was that of the beautiful Olga.

"Behold!" said he, solemnly. "I am her worshiper, her adorer."

"What do you tell me?" exclaimed the detective. "You might once have been what you say, but here is only the lifeless shell of the lovely being that has passed to her last account."

Ralph Seagrave smiled strangely.

"Are you sure of it?" said he.

"Of course I am, as were also the coroner, his medical examiner, and his jury. One does not worship or adore a lifeless form—a corpse!"

"No, surely. But what was the alleged cause of death in this case?"

"Heart disease, hastened by a violent nervous shock. So the physician made out in his report to the jury."

"The physician was deceived. The cause of her mother's death was apparent enough—a dislocation of the spinal cord by the murderous garrotter's wrenching clutch. But as for Olga, the innocent, the beautiful—"

"Well?" said Hawk, as the young man paused, with a repetition of his strange smile.

"As for Olga," continued the latter, "the examination was superficial, the premises hasty, the decision fallacious."

"What do you mean?"

"She is not dead, but sleepeth!"

Hawk thought at first that the youth had gone mad, but his earnestness and collectedness quickly dispelled this impression.

"Look!" said the youth, setting down the lamp, and removing the entire coffin lid. "This is the astounding revelation I made in secret during the examination, and have resolved to share with you alone."

The beautiful Olga had been dressed for burial in a simple, but becoming suit of every-day wear.

As he spoke, Seagrave lifted and bared the right arm of the motionless form.

It was round, white and firm as if molded from alabaster, save a tiny discolored spot in the hollow of the elbow.

"Observe that spot," said Seagrave.

"I am doing so," said Hawk, examining it closely.

"What is it like?"

"Like—like the puncture of a needle-point."

"Right! It is the puncture of a needle-like point, at least—the point of a hypodermic syringe!"

The detective looked up in astonishment.

"Ay!" said the other, solemnly. "Here is the tiny proof of the sub-cutaneous injection of morphine—doubtless with some other soporific ingredient, since the effect is so death-like and prolonged—by which the unknown villain was enabled to forestall her struggles and outcries directly after her first swoon upon witnessing her mother's assassination by the same ruthless hand!"

"This is amazing!" exclaimed Hawk. "Can restoration be effected?"

"I hope so, or I would not have taken you into my confidence before making the attempt."

"I always want to understand a man thoroughly. Why did you decide to take me into your confidence?"

"I know you by reputation, and was told that you are the detective who will have sole charge of this case. Therefore, in the event of my resuscitating this young girl, you are one to help preserve the secret."

"And why should such a secret be preserved?"

"Can you ask, and you a detective?"

"No matter; answer."

"If restored to life, I would have that restoration unknown to all save you and me and her, even to the extent of substituting a dummy in this coffin, and assisting at her mock burial, along with that of her poor mother's remains."

"Wherefore?"

"To further the ends of justice—to confound the murderer and abductor, when you shall have at last run him to earth, by confronting him with the dead-alive witness of his graver crime."

Hawk grasped the young man's hand and fairly wrung it.

"Excellent! The echo of my own thought!" he exclaimed. "You should have yourself been a detective. Now to end our suspense."

"Ah! Heaven grant the attempt may be successful!" said Seagrave, again drawing the sleeve over the lovely arm, and replacing it in the coffin. "Make sure that we are secured against intrusion."

"But how do you know that death has not really intervened?" said Hawk, as he inspected the fastenings of the doors.

He received no answer, and when he returned, Seagrave was bending over the placid face, observing through a magnifying glass a single hair which he had plucked from his head, and was holding under the delicately chiseled nostrils.

"It moves—there is evidence of the life breath remaining!" he at length joyfully exclaimed, though in a low tone, as he looked up. "Quick! examine for yourself, lest I be mistaken."

Hawk likewise made the test.

"It is true!" said he, after an anxious pause. "There is breath enough to just stir the hair, though almost imperceptibly."

"Another test, then," said Seagrave, taking from his pocket a small mirror, which, after wiping carefully, he held under Olga's nostrils. "Evidence by this test will be yet more conclusive, because less delicate."

He held his watch in his other hand, observing its dial intently until two minutes had elapsed, when he held up the mirror to the light, and studied its surface intently.

"Oh!" he murmured, with a groan. "There is nothing!"

"Wait!" said Hawk, who was looking over his shoulder. "My eyes are better than yours. There is surely a mist of breath upon the glass, though faint."

The medical student quickly brought the magnifier to bear.

"You are right!" he said, in a more hopeful tone. "Now for the stethoscope."

He produced such an instrument as he spoke, and, applying it to the heart of the cofined figure, bent his ear to the instrument, and listened with his own heart in his face, it might be said, so anxious and absorbed was his attention.

At last he looked up with a triumphant smile. "It beats!" he exclaimed. "The movement is faint, but regular—unmistakable! She lives!"

"And can be restored?"

"Without a doubt."

"Good! capital! What next?"

"She had better be left to herself for several hours, until nature shall have got her in readiness to support and respond to certain powerful restoratives. These are what I must go for in the mean time."

"Good again!"

"But the patient must not be left unguarded for an instant," said Seagrave. "Think of everything we have at stake—our secret, as well as Olga's life!"

"I have thought of it," said Hawk, "and shall, therefore, remain. In the mean time, do you also get your supper, and fetch me something to eat in a napkin. I have gone through much, and am faint."

"I shall do so without loss of time," said Seagrave, putting on his overcoat and taking up his hat.

"Wait! You will see an odd little boy with the policeman left on guard at the lower door."

"Yes."

"His name is Nixey," continued Hawk, "and he is in my employ. Give him this," passing a piece of silver "to send some one with for his

supper, but bid him on no account to quit his present post without orders from me."

"All right!"

"One thing more, young man!" continued Hawk, with some hesitation, as his companion was about quitting the room.

"What is it, Mr. Heron?"

"What shall I do—I mean what would you advise—in the event of—of—" Hawk again hesitated, and cast a significant look at the marble face in the coffin.

"Impossible!" said Seagrave reassuringly. "A return to consciousness without the aid of restoratives would be something unheard of. Think of something else till my return."

He passed out into the passage, and Hawk locked the door behind him.

"Think of something else, indeed!" he soliloquized. "Easier said than done. However, a general exploration of the premises is in order."

He took up the lamp and acted upon this suggestion.

There were four rooms, communicating with each other in a direct line. These were the front or best room, in which the coffins lay; a bedroom, which had been Olga's; another, in which her mother had slept; and a small kitchen, which had also been used as a living and eating room.

The front room and kitchen alone communicated directly with the outside passage, at the rear of which was the staircase. Each room, excepting the front one, had a side-window overlooking a large empty lot. All were plainly but comfortably furnished, and scrupulously neat.

Hawk passed around the foot of the snowy couch in Olga's room, and peered inquisitively through the panes of the window.

But the night had fallen intensely dark, as well as cold, there was not a light discernible among the dimly-outlined windows on the opposite wall, and the deep, wide space between presented nothing but a dense black hollow void.

So he re-entered the front room, and replaced the lamp on the mantle-piece.

Then, having nothing better to do, he seated himself in a large easy-chair, with his back to the passage door, and fell into a profound reverie, with his arms folded, his chin on his breast, and his half-closed eyes directed between the two coffins, and resting upon the lamp.

From a sad consideration of his present melancholy surroundings, his thoughts drifted, step by step, far back amid other and equally eventful scenes in his distant past.

It was a past in which one of the motionless and cofined forms before him—the elder and murdered one, that would never more assume the life-like aspect of which it had been despoiled—had figured gently and tenderly. A smile flitted over his lips at the fair past vision renewed. Then this was replaced by a troubled and angry expression, as another form—even that of the recent destroyer, the gigantic, many-shaped fugitive of his present pursuit—flitted darkly across the peopled mirror of that strange, eventful past, while greeting him with a half-menacing, half-affectionate look.

Presently the phantom giant seemed to make a gesture that mysteriously stripped the bosom of the dreamer bare. Then, as he pointed at the allegorical representation tattooed thereon, he seemed to hiss through his clinched teeth, with a demoniac smile. "Twas I who lovingly impressed it there in the old, bright days, but, ingrate, beware lest the legend be reversed—lest the hunted vulture turn in mid-flight, to rend and slay his falcon foe!" after which there succeeded a drowsy cloud that slowly enshrouded all.

In other words, the reverie of the detective lapsed into a profound and dreamless sleep, for he was wearied out, and exhausted nature at last asserted her just dues.

When he finally started up awake, with a mysterious sensation that some one had been trying the fastenings of the door behind him, it was likewise with a consciousness that he had slept far into the night.

He rubbed his eyes, slowly collecting his scattered thoughts, and then emitted a half-articulate cry.

Olga was sitting up in her coffin, gazing at him with wide-open eyes, that were full of mingled horror and bewilderment!

Taking in the requirements of the situation on the instant, Hawk glided between the coffins, covering that of the widow out of sight with a piece of drapery as he did so, and put his arm around her reassuringly.

"Do not make any outcry, I beseech you!" said he, in a low, soothing voice. "You have had a great shock, have been unconscious, but are now restored."

She looked at him again, still bewilderedly, and then around her.

"Where am I?" she asked, faintly. "Ah! I half-remember—my mother—that human fiend! Have mercy, Heaven!"

And she hid her face, shuddering convulsively.

At that moment, to add to Hawk's embarrassment, there came a thundering knock at the door.

She now clung to him in extreme terror. He

still had his arm supporting her. He knew the summons could not be Seagrave's. Whose could it be, and what should he do?

Just then the loud knock was repeated.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE DEAD-ALIVE.

At this critical juncture, our hero was almost at his wits' end.

The bewildered girl—the dead-alive, as she might be called—still continued to cling to him; the imperative knock on the door had just been repeated.

To open to the summons, even to ask abruptly who it was demanding admittance, or to permit Olga to make the least outcry, might alike be fatal to the momentous secret of her restoration to life and intelligence.

The knock was again repeated!

Boldness was now the only course, and Hawk adopted it.

"Listen with all your soul, and try to grasp my meaning!" he hissed into Olga's ear, in a deep, intense whisper. "I have restored you to life, but it is necessary, it is vital, that this should be kept secret! Do you understand?"

His only answer was a convulsive clutching of his arm, which he, perforce, accepted as an affirmative.

"Some one, perhaps an enemy, is at the door," he continued, with equal impressiveness. "You must again lie back, as you were, and simulate the aspect and attitude of death."

Successive shudders thrilled her from head to foot.

"But it must be!" he continued, peremptorily.

"Otherwise, all may be lost! Do as I tell you—there is danger, perhaps imminent, deadly danger, threatening!"

Another shudder, and then the light figure lay motionless in his arms. She had fainted.

This was opportune, at all events. He returned the unconscious form to its former rigid and composed attitude in the coffin.

Just as he had done so, there came another knock.

"What? eh?" he stammered out, with a yawn and a shuffling noise, as though just waking up.

"Who's there?"

"It is I—Clarisse!" replied a voice, through the door—a voice singularly soft, in contrast with the rigor of the knocks thereon, though at the same time hurried and agitated. "Be quick! I am the bearer of an important message!"

Greatly astonished, he removed the easy-chair, and, opening the door, confronted the visitor, without permitting her to enter the room.

Notwithstanding this, Clarisse, who was comfortably and even fashionably clad, threw a swift, comprehensive glance around the interior.

Her looks, however, were unaffectedly agitated, and she looked at him interestedly.

"What! you alone here in this terrible chamber of death and horror?" she ejaculated, in a low voice of dread.

"Yes, alone, but on guard," he replied, regarding her narrowly.

"It is terrible!" she continued. "But I half-imagined I heard you conversing with some one."

"Nothing of the sort, though I might have muttered in the uneasy slumber from which I was aroused."

"That is strange!"

"Not near so strange as your visit at this untimely hour!" exclaimed Hawk, impatiently consulting his watch. "Why, it is long past midnight!"

"What of that?"

Her manner increased his embarrassment. She seemed to be maneuvering for delay, and Olga might recover her senses at any moment, and betray everything.

"Why are you here?" he exclaimed, a little savagely. "Come, be lively! Your interruption is neither agreeable nor exactly decent."

"Rather ask me where and whom I am from, young man?"

"Good! Where and whom are you from, then?"

"From Bellevue Hospital, but a few blocks away, and a young man who but a short time ago managed to give me the message I bring to you. He calls himself Seagrave, and he lies there at the point of death."

"You astonish me! Tell me all you know at once."

"That is easily done. Two hours ago I heard cries for help in front of my basement room in Melton place. I had not yet retired, and am used to taking my own part, and occasionally that of a person in sore need. I seized a pistol, and rushed out of the house. As I did so, two ruffians—a short stout man and another whom I recognized as the repulsive wretch you saw for a moment with your friend, Mr. Blithers, on the front stoop there—took to their heels, while a young man whom they had been assaulting was sinking to the pavement."

"Oho!"

"I ran to his assistance. Before he became insensible, he mentioned your name in a way that caused me to recall you as the person named, and besought me to acquaint you with what had befallen him. Then he fainted."

"A pretty story, to be sure! How, then, could you possibly have learned—"

"Don't imagine yourself cleverer than you really are, young man, until you've heard me out."

"All right."

"The young man had been terribly beaten. I had no conveniences for attending to his hurts, even if carrying him into my room had been the proper thing for a lonely young woman, with no dependence save her spotless reputation, to do. You are wrong in smiling, sir, but I shall let it pass. I sounded the alarm, and followed the young man to the hospital, on his being conveyed thither in an ambulance that was presently summoned by the policeman who answered my call."

"That was both kind and thoughtful, Clarisse."

A momentary gleam of genuine pleasure leaped into the girl's comely face.

"Thanks, Mr. Heron," said she. "But there is little more to tell. I remained by the young man's couch, after his hurts had been dressed, until he recovered his senses. Then he besought me to hasten here to you. Although it was then past midnight, I gave him my promise, and here I am."

"You left him at the point of death, you say?"

"He looked that way to me, though the doctors may have been a little more hopeful."

"Ah, indeed. But you have not told me the nature of the message."

"I forgot. It is to beseech you to go to him without an instant's delay."

"No more?"

"No more, save that he hinted of an important secret between you two that might be lost if you did not hasten to him at once."

"Indeed! Yet he must have known that I cannot leave my post here under any circumstances whatever."

"Not even to receive the young man's dying words?"

"Not even for that!"

"How strangely you talk. Nobody would run away with these poor murdered bodies. And another glance, which she threw about the room, rested upon Olga's white, upturned face. A harsh, stern look suddenly came into the detective's face."

"Clarisse, you have overdone your part," said he, contemptuously.

"What! do you not believe my story?"

"Yes; the story part hangs together well enough, but the message does not."

"What do you mean?"

"That the message is false on its face—a miserable fabrication."

"Sir, upon my honor—"

"Enough! It is simply impossible that Seagrave should have sent such a message, if even at the point of death."

"Mr. Heron, I swear by all—"

"Begone!" and here there was an ugly ring in the detective's voice.

Clarisse faded back into the dark passage toward the head of the stairs.

She made a motion, as though to renew her entreaties, but met with a gesture even more uncompromising than his tone of voice.

Then, turning suddenly away, she hurried down the stairs.

She had hardly been gone more than a minute when a sudden idea occurred to Hawk, and, going to the head of the stairs, he called aloud upon Nixey's name.

"Ay, ay, boss!" came promptly from the passage on the ground floor.

A moment later, the boy appeared before his master.

"Have you been constantly at your post down there?" asked Hawk.

"All the time, boss."

"A young woman, though, just passed you on her way out?"

"Right you are, boss. The same what stood on the stoop in Melton place when you crawled out of the man-hole."

"True. But why did you let her pass you on her way in, without first ascertaining if it was agreeable for me to see her?"

"She hadn't passed me on her way in, boss."

"What?"

"It's a puzzler, but true, boss. Both I and the policeman down at the entrance will swear to it."

"How did she get in, then?"

"The Lord only knows, boss, and he won't tell. It's a screecher."

Hawk remained for a moment buried in thought.

"Resume your post, and let this pass for the present," said he, at length. "By the way, as you have opportunity, inquire into the reputation of the other houses in this row."

"All right, boss."

The faithful little fellow disappeared down the stairs, and Hawk hurried back to his own post.

Everything was just as he had left it as he re-entered the room, locking the door behind him.

"Fresh mystery, ever fresh mystery!" he said to himself, half-desperately. "But I can only

attend to one thing at a time. This accident to Seagrave, if truly reported, may necessitate my taking the old German up-stairs into my confidence. But my first care must be to once more resuscitate Olga, and supplant her fears and bewilderment with some degree of prudence and common-sense."

He was about to apply a restorative when the thought occurred to him that it would be better to bring Olga back to consciousness elsewhere—say, in the next room, which had been her own—apart from her funereal and terror-inspiring surroundings.

He speedily acted upon this suggestion. Having lifted her out of the coffin, he laid her gently on the bed in the adjoining room.

Then, having found and lighted another lamp, he was not long in arousing the girl out of her swoon, through the alternative application of cold water and some smelling-salts, which latter he was so lucky as to find in a toilette-table near at hand, when a few drops of brandy from his flask completed her restoration.

She was again starting up in a wildly bewildered manner, when he gently restrained her, and at the same time riveted her attention with the soothing yet inspiring powers of his magnetic gaze.

"Now listen, with all the calmness at your command, to the story I am about to tell you, Miss Ashcombe," said he, in his low, thrilling and intense voice, "and do not offer to answer any question I subsequently put to you, unless you can do so with a degree of composure."

In answer to his questioning gaze, her eyes gradually lost their dazed expression. This was succeeded by a look of horror, showing that recollections pertaining to her mother's assassination were at work. To this succeeded an inquisitive look, doubtless in view of her present situation. And finally, as the sympathy and earnestness of his gaze mastered her, she seemed to control her emotions by a powerful effort, and there came into her eyes an expression of mingled trustfulness, intelligence and self-restraint.

Satisfied with what he at last interpreted in the sad, answering gaze, Hawk rapidly but succinctly pictured to her mind everything that had passed since the tragedy, his own connection therewith, her present extraordinary position, his plan of keeping her restoration a secret, even to the extent of promoting a sham funeral in her case, until the ends of justice should have been served, and the embarrassment he was still laboring under.

The intelligence deepened in her eyes, as she drank in his words, though she kept them closed for several minutes after he had finished.

Presently she opened them again, and delighted him by saying, in a calm, collected voice:

"I agree to all you propose, sir, you seem so wise and good. In the mean time, how and where will you hide me?"

Hawk mentioned the name of the old music-master.

"Ah, the good, the kind old mynheer!" she murmured. "Yes; that will be well."

"Capital!" said Hawk; "but now my first care must be to arrange a lay-figure to occupy your place in the—the—perhaps you understand what I hesitate to say?"

She shuddered, partly covering her face.

"Yes, yes," she murmured, disjointedly. "It is horrible, but—but I will try to collect my thoughts—my recollections. Ah, yes! my poor mother—she not only made wax flowers, but also wax faces and busts for the modistes—and I was sometimes her model. Wardrobe—next room—ah! Those drops on the dressing-case—quick!"

Hawk had understood enough. He snatched from the dressing-case a small vial which she had indicated, and administered a few drops of its contents.

Their effect was almost immediate. After he had seen her sink back upon the couch, with closed eyes and a general expression of tranquillity, he whispered a parting word of encouragement, and hurried back into the front room, partly closing the intervening door.

He had before this noticed a large wardrobe, which occupied the space between the fireplace and one of the windows.

An examination of its contents now, to his great satisfaction, discovered an entire full-length figure, attired very much as Olga's form had been while lying in the coffin, and whose neck, face and head, even to the color and arrangement of the hair, were fairly modeled after the young girl's characteristics.

Still more *apropos* to the emergency, the life-like colors had not yet been applied to the waxen features, which therefore appropriately counterfeited death.

"Wonderful!" muttered Hawk, while taking the figure in his arms, and composing it in the coffin. "Could anything have chanced more fortunately?"

While engaged in refastening the lid upon the casket, he thought he heard a soft movement in the adjoining room, and was about to ascertain the cause, but a sense of delicacy restrained him, and he went on with his task.

In a few minutes all was completed. The two coffins occupied the trestles, side by side, as at

the outset, the lids being equally secured, and the faces of the actual and counterfeit dead, as seen under the glass panels, seeming alike composed for the eternal sleep, while maintaining the characteristic family resemblance that had existed between mother and daughter.

"There," said Hawk to himself, viewing the completion of his work with much complacency, though beginning to feel faint and dizzy from lack of nourishment and the nervous strains he had undergone; "the forms will doubtless be thus committed to the grave, without any further examination, and the secret of Olga's resuscitation and continued existence will be safe. It may be a questionable proceeding to deceive both justice and the public in such a solemn affair, but it is only for the time being, and I firmly believe that the means are justified by the end in view. Now for a look at my fair patient."

Thinking that Olga might have fallen into a recuperative sleep, inasmuch as not a sound had issued from the next room since the slight movement he had noticed, he stole to the half-ajar door and peered through the opening.

Then, with a half-frantic cry, he flung the door wide, and sprung into the room.

The bed was unoccupied, Olga had disappeared!

The window on the opposite side of the bed was wide open, showing the outlines of an iron fire-escape platform just outside of it.

He dashed to the opening, and, as he reached it, the inflowing air flouted in his face a broad sheet of white paper that had been pinned to the curtain.

Holding it up to the light, he read the following words, scrawled upon the paper in hurried characters:

"SIR DUPE AND FOOL!—Be of good cheer! Both your secret and its fair subject are safe in the possession of
KOTZKA, THE PROSCRIBED."

Crumpling the paper in his clinched hands and gnashing his teeth, the detective sprung out upon the fire-escape staging.

No ladders connected it with the corresponding platforms either below or above, but a stout knotted rope was dangling before his eyes.

Just as he was looking upward, however, and, just as he caught a glimpse of feminine drapery being dragged back over the roof-ledge, a low, diabolical laugh thrilled down from above, and this was followed by a falling mass of brick and stone dislodged from the coping.

Receiving part of it on his head, the detective had just enough strength to stagger back into the room, when he swooned away upon the couch.

CHAPTER IX.

NIXEY'S HARD LUCK.

WHEN Hawk recovered his senses, with a splitting headache, it was to perceive the early daylight streaming into the room where he lay, and to hear old Mr. Schmidt's gentle voice in the passage pleading for admittance.

"A moment's patience, Mr. Schmidt, and I'll admit you," called out the detective, springing to his feet.

Realizing that it would now be best to keep the old man wholly in the dark as to what had occurred, he first went into the kitchen, to ascertain what injuries he might have received, and remove all traces of such as far as possible.

His clothing was covered with mortar dust, but, on consulting a looking-glass, he found to his great relief that whatever shock he had sustained had only soiled and grimed his head and face, without causing either contusion or bloodshed.

He therefore concluded that he had escaped the heavier materials of the mass that had been hurled at him with such murderous intent, and a brisk application of soap and water and a wisp-broom, all of which were fortunately at hand, soon put him in a more presentable condition.

"Ah, Mr. Heron!" said Mr. Schmidt, glancing mournfully at the closed caskets as he was admitted a few moments later; "how did you pass the watching hours, and where is your companion?"

"Mr. Seagrave went away some hours ago, and, as for myself, I have been faithful to my trust," said Hawk, counterfeiting a cheerfulness he was far from feeling. "But tell me, were you disturbed by an unusual noise some hours ago?"

"Ah, mein Gott, it is true, mynheer!" exclaimed the German. "The side of the house seemed falling out, and my fire-escape above is littered with rubbish."

"So is the fire-escape belonging to these rooms," said Hawk. "We have had many frosts and thaws of late, which must have caused part of the roof-ledge to give way."

"Ah, like enough, mynheer!"

"Now, look you, Mr. Schmidt, I am worn out and in need of rest. So, you will have to take my place this afternoon."

"Yes, mynheer, and I will take charge till the poor remains are buried away in my own plot in Woodlawn."

He passed between the coffins and his tears flowed afresh as he looked from one lifeless face

to the other beneath the glass panels, without, to Hawk's great relief, suspecting the substitution in the one case.

Still, the detective wanted to feel perfectly assured on this point.

"You won't allow the caskets to be opened again, my friend?" said he. "Public curiosity should be satisfied with a view of the poor dead faces through the glass, and a word of caution to the undertaker."

"Oh, Mynheer Heron, never fear for that!" blurted out the old man, taking a couple of clean white handkerchiefs from his pocket and covering the glass panels with them. "The vile public curiosity shall not be gratified at all. See! the spotless kerchiefs shall thus conceal the poor faces till I shall have sent for yet more spotless flowers to take their place. After that, covered from mortal gaze ever more they shall remain, for I myself shall see the bodies lowered into the grave!"

Quite at ease now as to the preservation of the secret, for he had no apprehension that Olga's abductor would dare to divulge it, Hawk offered a few more suggestions to the old man and then hurried away.

Nixey was at his post at the lower door, along with a policeman, who was surly enough at not having yet been relieved, and Hawk beckoned to him as he passed out.

"Anything else happened since the mystery of Clarisse's entrance?" he asked, when they had drawn out of the policeman's hearing.

"Nary a thing, boss," replied the boy, giving him a keen look. "But something's happened to you, boss, if you'll excuse me for sayin' it."

"What do you mean?"

"Your eyes is set an' your face drawed, boss, like as if you had been through a quartz-crusher an' come out game but shaky."

"That is neither here nor there at present," said Hawk, half-angrily. "I merely need sleep and rest. In the mean time, I have certain instructions to give you."

"I'm your Ariel, boss."

"In the first place, what have you discovered concerning the other houses in this Gotham block?"

"There are eight in all, boss. The one at the end yonder, what we've been guarding, is respectable. So is the next one to it. The third one, what we're just standin' in front of, isn't. All the rest are."

Hawk threw his gaze over the front of the house in question. It only differed from its neighbors in presenting less neatly-dressed windows and an uninviting hallway, whose street-door had a look of being seldom closed.

"It's a bad 'un, boss!" commented the boy.

"In what way?"

"Door open all night; two shoplifters nipped in second-floor flat last week; rows frequent; Health Board notified; complaints lively; owner's a Jew, what was once lugged for arson."

"That will do," said Hawk, taking out his note-book and writing a few words in pencil.

"Now get your breakfast, and then take this note to its address. You will wait at the hospital for an answer. Then seek Mr. Blithers at the Brunswick, and say that I can't call on him till late in the day. Don't on any account tell Blithers where I lodge. After attending to these things, return to your post until after the funeral. If you don't see me there, seek me at my lodging, and report."

"Nothin' more, boss?"

"Yes, one thing. Just before and during the funeral services be in the room with Mr. Schmidt as much as possible, and, should the young woman Clarisse put in an appearance, watch her every movement attentively. Keep up your spying upon her, if possible, to the last moment. That is all."

Nixey touched his cap, ducked his head and scraped his foot, after his wont, and skipped away, while Hawk delayed no longer in seeking some much-needed nourishment at a neighboring eating-saloon, after which he hastened to his room, and went to bed.

Our hero occupied a furnished room in a quiet private residence not a great way from Montauk place. He had for landlady a discreet, motherly old lady, who thought all the world of him, was thoroughly used to his habits, and would have deliberated long before admitting a visitor to his presence without first obtaining his permission, while, as for doing such a thing unannounced, she would not have dreamed of it.

Judge, then, of Hawk's astonishment, on awaking late in the afternoon out of the profound slumber into which his exhaustion had plunged him, to find a man standing by his bed, apparently lost in a searching study of his face, and that person "Mr. Jack Blithers, of Scotland Yard, London."

However, Hawk did not always manifest his astonishment, so he merely opened his eyes widely, and riveted his visitor with a rather stern look.

"Hallo! peep-o'-day at last, eh?" cried "Blithers," with his fat, hearty laugh, which somehow was not very agreeable to Hawk just then. "I'll bet my head, you know, that you're wondering how I found you out, and came to be here!"

Hawk vouchsafed no answer, but, leisurely rising, began dressing with the utmost indifference.

"Ha, ha, ha! You see it happened in this way, my boy," continued 'Blithers,' seating himself and affecting not to notice his ungracious reception. "I was in bed myself till late this morning—you see how my neck's plastered and poulticed; Gad, it's a wonder that rascal didn't kill me!—and was on my way to the hotel desk when the accident occurred that brought me here."

Still no answer.

"Sad news I've brought you, too, my boy!" Blithers went on, with sudden gravity. "That odd little chap in the district messenger's dress, you know—in your employ, I believe, and was it Nixey you called him?—well, I felt bound to hunt you up, after the shocking accident that caused his death, so I at once—"

"Heavens and earth!" exclaimed Hawk, finding his tongue at last; "what are you saying?"

"Painful, but true, my boy!"

"Dead, you say?"

"Tumbled down the hotel elevator—smashed to a jelly, with hardly a doubt."

Hawk had loved the boy. He grasped the dressing-case at which he was standing, pale as death.

"It was about eleven this morning," Blithers went on. "Perhaps the lad was on an errand to me from you?"

Hawk nodded, and signed him to proceed.

"I was crossing in front of the shaft," the other continued, "on my way to the desk, the elevator car itself being doubtless at the top of the building, when, whiz, plunge! down rushed the lad's falling body!"

Hawk groaned.

"Swift as it passed me, I recognized it as that of your little Nixey."

"Was there no outcry?"

"Not from him—nothing but a dull, sickening thud down at the bottom of the shaft."

"Horrible!"

"I should say so! 'Is the boy dead?' I asked of one of the clerks that came rushing up from below a few moments later. 'Dead as a door-nail!' was the reply. I waited to learn no more, but made tracks for Police Head-quarters to learn your address. Was a long time unearthing it, to be sure, but here I am at last, and—"

For the first time Blithers's emotions seemed too much for him, and Hawk extended his hand to him.

"I—I really didn't mean to incur your displeasure, my boy!" blurted out the big man, apparently not seeing the proffered hand, "but—but I thought you might want to know without delay, and—and, finding the door below unlocked, I just ventured—"

"Say no more of it, my good friend," said Hawk, seizing the hand with a grateful pressure, "and forgive me for having treated you so cavalierly. But the fact was—"

He was interrupted in his turn by a peculiar ring—or, rather, series of light rings—at the door-bell, and he gave a surprised start.

"Eh? What?" said Blithers, looking up.

"Why do you eye me so singularly, my boy?"

"I hardly know," said Hawk. "But, hark! The door has been opened—there is now a bounding step on the stair—and now—Why, how now, Mr. Blithers! what am I to think of your statements?"

The last words were almost shouted out, as there came a light, familiar rat-tat-tat on the door—a counterpart of the peculiar rings at the door-bell.

"Come in!" cried Hawk.

And then, as Nixey—Nixey, pale and haggard, 'tis true, but Nixey himself, surprisingly alive and active, for all that—hopped into the room, Hawk caught him in his arms and fairly hugged him.

But 'Blithers' had started to his feet with an amazement as unaffected as Hawk's.

"Jerusalem!" he stammered; "the lad—the very boy himself!"

"You can bet your life on that, an' live it out, too, Mr. Britisher!" said Nixey, with his characteristic spirit. "Who else should it be?"

"I'm beat out!" said Blithers. "With my own eyes I saw you plunging down the elevator shaft, and a moment later the clerk said to me, 'The boy is as dead as a door-nail!'"

"So he was, sir, but he meant the bell-boy I fell on, and not yourn truly, whose life was saved at the expense of another's," said Nixey, wiping away a tear. "Poor little chap! His name was Tommy Kelly, and he's left a poor mother and sister to mourn him. But I'm good for many a tumble yet, boss, though sort of rattled up just at present, boss," and he responded gratefully to Hawk's continued caress.

"Where are you from last?" asked Hawk.

"The hospital—St. Luke's—boss. They'd have kept me there longer, but I knowed you'd be worried, and wouldn't have it."

"How did it all happen?"

"I was fired down the shaft—yes, boss, fairly fired down—it was a reg'lar attempt to murder me!"

"To murder you!" exclaimed both men in a breath. "By whom?"

"Not havin' optics in the back of my head,

boss, I can't say," responded the lad, ignoring 'Blithers' altogether.

"Explain," ordered Hawk.

"Short an' sweet's the gait, boss. I had knocked at Mr. Blithers's door on the third floor fur ten minutes, wi'out gettin' an answer, an' was standin' outside the elevator gate, waitin' fur the machine to come down. Suddenly I was grabbed by the scruff of the neck, while a big paw was pressed over my eyes an' mouth. I heard the gate shot back, and, before I could squeal or kick, I was fired head-first down the shaft. You know the rest, boss."

"Something like my own adventure at the Brunswick," remarked Hawk.

"But this is most extraordinary!" exclaimed 'Blithers.' "Have you made this statement to the authorities, boy?"

"I was senseless when picked up, Mr. Britisher, after killing poor Tommy Kelly, and I'm just from the hospital."

"But you intend to make charges, if even against a would-be assassin who is unknown?"

"Nary a charge, Mr. Britisher!"

"But this is madness! Why not, pray?"

"I never makes charges, Mr. Britisher; I gets even!"

'Blithers' threw up his hands in a comically despairing way, and said he believed he would be off, as he had some pressing affairs.

"Anything fresh in our case, Hawk?" he asked, with his hand on the door-knob.

"Nothing worth mentioning," replied Hawk, who had resumed his toilet.

"What! nothing at all—nothing more concerning our fugitive colossus?" And it struck the young man that the words were accompanied by a look of extra inquisitiveness.

"Nothing, I tell you. If anything turns up that you ought to know, I'll bring you word."

"Thanks!" said 'Blithers,' in his hearty way, and he disappeared.

Night was already falling.

"Quick, Nixey!" exclaimed Hawk, as soon as he heard 'Blithers' pass out of the house. "Shadow that man to his next destination, and report to me at the Gotham Flats."

"Go's the motto, boss, an' level's your head to mistrust him!" chirruped the lad, as he disappeared.

CHAPTER X.

AN INTERRUPTED CONCLAVE.

HAWK HERON, on quitting his lodgings a few minutes later, went directly to Mr. Schmidt's apartments, where he found the old man, who had not been long back from the burial at Woodlawn, engaged in cooking his supper.

"Ah, my good friend!" said the latter, welcoming his friend lugubriously; "you were not at the funeral, but it was no matter. Besides myself, there were none but curiosity-mongers present, but my tears were copious and heartfelt enough for a hundred, the religious services were appropriate, and I saw the poor victims laid away in their last resting place."

"May they rest in peace, but not unavenged!" said Hawk, fervently.

"Ah, mynheer, it does my old heart good to hear you say that!" cried the music-master. "Come, be seated; you shall share my evening meal with me."

Hawk assented, and then explained that he had arranged to meet his messenger, Nixey, there.

"That is well, Mr. Heron," said the old man, "for after supper I shall have to meet the undertaker by appointment, and you can have my rooms here to yourself."

Hawk listened for some time, without reply, to Mr. Schmidt's copious but rather uninteresting talk about the funeral, but during the repast it occurred to him to ask if the undertaker had recovered his runaway horse and wagon.

"Truly, yes, my good friend, for he told me as much," was the reply. "But the oddest thing is that the undertaker has never again set eyes on the giant that disappeared with them."

"He is not likely to do so," observed Hawk, "and there may be others more disappointed than he."

"But he had hired him as an extra hand by the merest chance, without suspecting him to be a madman, or something worse," said Mr. Schmidt, "and the fellow did not come back, even to ask for his wages."

"How very extraordinary!" said Hawk, who could not help smiling at the old man's simplicity. "Now, suspecting what you do, my friend, don't you think that giant would be something of an ass to seek notoriety, or rather conspicuousness, just now?"

Supper being ended, Mr. Schmidt began to weep softly once more, while clearing away the dishes.

"Ah, truly I do, my young friend, but I had grown confused. Hark! there are rapid steps ascending the stair. Your messenger must be coming, so I will attend to my business affair. If you go away before my return, lock the door, and put the key under the edge of the oilcloth outside."

Nixey entered the room, breathing hard, as the proprietor was taking his leave.

"Well?" said Hawk, as soon as the two were alone.

"I sleuthed him down, boss," said the lad, "though it was a hard race, as he took a cab as soon as he had turned the first corner."

"Good! Where did you track him to?"

"Melton place—the house of Clarisse—the house of the man-hole!"

"Oho!"

Hawk remained for a moment buried in thought.

"And what more natural than that Blithers should go there again, in view of what I have already noted?" he mused. "That he had some sort of detective business when I first chanced on him there, seemed quite apparent. How often has my own private business thrown me amid equally questionable surroundings, that I would not have explained to my dearest friend! Truly, I must be mistrusting Blithers without sufficient cause, and yet—"

He turned his eyes upon Nixey, who was studying him intently.

"I say, my little friend," said he, kindly, "we'll just drop Mr. Blithers out of our plans for the present, and I wish you would think no more of that attempt on your life—at least, not just now."

The boy's impish face flushed with pleasure. Street Arab as he was, a word of kindness from Hawk was his delight, and to be thus consulted confidentially was an honor that made him feel six inches taller.

"Agreed's the ticket, boss," said he; "an' you're the doorkeeper."

"Well, then," said Hawk, "now as to the commissions I gave you this morning?"

"All hunky, boss, leavin' out the swell's name what's to be dropped."

"Was Clarisse at the funeral?"

"Yes, boss; at the services."

"How did she act?"

"Like a thoroughbred lady, boss; but at the same time as if disappointed."

"Disappointed at what?"

"At not bein' able to look at the face of the younger woman's remains."

"Ah!"

"Yes; old Schmidty had covered up the windows of both coffins with flowers, an' so they remained."

"Clarisse did not accompany the remains to the cemetery, then?"

"No; she made a motion to get into one of the kerriages, and then changed her mind."

"You then shadowed her to the house in Melton place?"

"Right you are, boss."

"And saw no more of her?"

"Nary a sign."

"Now as to your first commission. You gave my note to the patient in Bellevue Hospital?"

"Yes."

"Did he seem to understand its contents?"

"He growled and cursed under his breath while readin' it, enough to make one think so, boss."

"That bespeaks animation, at all events."

"An' why not, boss?"

"Why, I understand he was half-killed."

"Killed be blowed!" exclaimed Nixey, with supreme contempt. "Do you fancy where he is now, boss?"

"Yes; in the hospital, I suppose."

"Wrong."

"Where, then?"

"At the curb-stone, just over the way, waitin' for me to signal him to come up, if agreeable to you."

"The deuce!" exclaimed Hawk; and then he muttered between his clinched teeth: "Ah, Clarisse, Clarisse! am I always to be the dupe of your deceptions?"

"Hold on, boss, if you'll pardoning the liberty!" said Nixey. "The young feller likewise alluded to that 'ere odd young woman as havin' been his friend in need."

"But she assured me that he had been almost murdered."

"So she might have thought at first, boss, an' likewise the young feller himself an' the surgeons what looked after him. But the poundin' he had got turned out to have made nothin' but lumps an' bumps, after all."

"I rejoice to learn this. Signal him to come up at once."

Nixey went to one of the windows, opened it, and wafted three shrill whistles down into the street.

A moment later, Seagrave entered the apartments.

He wore many bandages around his face and under his hat, but his eyes were eager and his wiry activity seemed to have undergone no diminution.

"Never think of my injuries, Mr. Heron," said he, after returning Hawk's welcoming grasp of the hand, "but tell me the particulars of our failure; that is," with a side-glance at Nixey, "when it is convenient."

"I have determined to take Nixey fully into my confidence," said Hawk. "Stand by the door yonder, my lad, and keep your ears pricked."

Nixey sprang to his post with sparkling eyes and flushing cheeks.

"Now, Seagrave, let's commence at the beginning," said Hawk. "How did you chance

into such an out-of-the-way spot as Melton place, where you were assaulted?"

"Why, your message directed me to go there."

"I sent you no message; but go on."

"Last night, at about eleven o'clock," Seagrave proceeded, "while on my way back to you, I was standing in a drug store, waiting for a certain prescription to be put up of whose intended use you are aware, when a ragged little girl brought me a note. It purported to come from you, and directed me to apply without delay at No. 23 Melton place, where something of importance would be communicated to me."

"And you obeyed it?"

"I am ashamed to confess that I was unsuspecting enough to do so."

"And the result?"

"I was suddenly assaulted, at the spot indicated by two ruffians, who would have doubtless hammered me to death with their bludgeons, had not the handsome young woman, who subsequently carried my message to you, bravely rushed to my assistance."

"At least one point in Clarisse's favor!" thought Hawk, with a sense of pleasurable relief; and then he added, aloud: "Let me see the note you received at the drug store."

"It has disappeared. I either lost it in the struggle, or it was stolen from me."

"So, that is all?"

"Not quite," said Seagrave, uneasily. "The strangest part of my misadventure is to be told."

"Go ahead."

"Well, no matter by whom I was lured to Melton place, the ruffians who attacked me there evidently mistook me for some one else."

"What makes you think so?"

"My assailants, or rather one of them—a short, stocky fellow, evidently a foreigner, with side whiskers—kept muttering something in broken English during the assault, which convinced me that they were Anarchists, Socialists, Nihilists, or something of the sort, who considered me as a false fellow-conspirator—as one meditating treason to his associates."

"That doesn't seem likely to me."

"But I am sure of it. Sometimes the fellow I allude to would hurl upon me epithets in Russian, and I happen to have some acquaintance with the Russian tongue. 'Miscreant spy!' 'Dog of a traitor!' 'What, would'st thou betray us to the Czar's minions?' These are samples of his furious expressions that were hissed into my ears till I lost the power to understand them."

Hawk now grew grave.

"This is a new element in the tissue of perils closing in around us," said he, after a pause. "Kotzka was evidently the prime mover in all this. He must have reported you as a spy to some secret society of which he may be the chief. What was your other assailant like?"

"A horrible-looking tatterdemalion—an importation, I should say, from some foreign cess-pool of crime."

"Aha! a portrait that both Nixey and I recognize, I fancy," said Hawk. "Now it is my turn. But meanwhile, Nixey, take a look at the stove in the back room there. I smell something burning."

The boy obeyed, bringing back word that the fire in the stove had gone out.

All were then aware of the smell alluded to; but they attributed it to some cooking going on in the adjoining house, the dividing walls being thin and out of repair.

Then Hawk went on to relate in detail the strange events that had intervened since Seagrave and he had separated in the chamber of death.

His listeners hung upon his words with the most absorbing attention.

Seagrave groaned aloud when he had finished.

"To think of Olga in the power of that fiend—her own mother's murderer!" he exclaimed. "It is appalling!"

"True," said Hawk, "but the secret of her restoration is still safe, since her captor will not dare divulge it."

"Ah, but may he not effectually silence her as—the mother was silenced?" And Seagrave shuddered.

"Hardly, or he would have done so in the first instance, instead of merely drugging her."

"But you forget that now she may be a witness against him—the only one, in fact."

"Was she not so in the first instance, and did he not spare her?"

"Ay, to be buried alive, as she surely would have been but for our intervention!"

"Never believe it! The villain is a deep one. We but forestalled his intention in rescuing Olga, and effecting a substitute for the grave."

"Do you think so?"

"I am sure of it. And now, in this connection, listen to another story of mine."

He then related in detail his adventure in the secret passage, but more particularly that portion of it that referred to the fissure at the tunnel's entrance, whence the groan and chain-clanking had issued, and which Clarisse had so hastily closed, while attributing the sounds to the gurgling of the water-pipes.

"It's a strange story," said Seagrave, when it

was finished. "But I don't see how it connects with our lost Olga and her whereabouts."

"You don't?" said Hawk. "Well, I do, though it is true that I have a pretty lively imagination."

"Explain your theory."

"It is this: In the first place, Clarisse is in some way in Count Kotzka's power, though whether through fear or a common interest I can't determine. Perhaps some political oath or revolutionary conspiracy may furnish the binding tie. Who knows? At all events, the socialistic tinge of the assault upon you, Seagrave, has set me to thinking. Well, to my mind, some poor prisoner is kept in chains in a secret cell near the mouth of that secret passage. Kotzka is doubtless that prisoner's jailer, and Clarisse his attendant."

"Doubtless."

"Well, something tells me that there is some mysterious relation between that prisoner and Olga—that communication with the one would lead to a knowledge of the other's whereabouts."

"Why do you think so?"

"To answer you intelligently would necessitate my revealing much of the history of my past life—a dark and eventful one, mostly amid scenes far away. That I am not now prepared to do; though henceforth you may learn it from my lips."

"Thank you. Come, then, how shall we set about reaching the mysterious prisoner of the secret cell?"

"We must first apply to Nixey," said Hawk, turning to the boy. "We can't avail ourselves of the man-hole, as it is too public, but Nixey knows of a spot where the tunnel opens out among some rocks in a secluded place."

"That I does, boss!" cried the boy, proudly. "It's down in the rocks where the last of the squatters' shanties in this ward are lingerin', an' where me an' the Short Tails used to have lots of fun!"

"Could you guide us there this very night, for instance, and then procure us lanterns and crowbars?" said Hawk. "But the deuce take that burning smell! There it is again, and stronger than before!"

"You bet, boss!" replied the lad, intent upon the question. "There's a livery stable just under the bluff, where the hostler's a friend of mine, an' I could get everything needful from him. But right you are, boss; somethin' is burnin', sure!"

"Yes," said Seagrave, going to a window, "and there's a great crowd of people collecting down there in the street. What can be the matter?"

Hawk also sprang to his feet, while Nixey darted out into the passage.

The latter returned almost instantly, with consternation depicted in every feature.

"Fire!" he shouted. "Oh, boss, we're cut off already! The stairways an' passages are chock full of smoke an' flame!"

A choking fit stopped his further utterance, for a puff of dense smoke had followed him back into the room.

The many-feathered pets belonging to the old professor began to flutter wildly in their cages, as Hawk and Seagrave dashed out into the passage.

Nixey had not overstated the danger.

Dense volumes of smoke and flame drove them back, and they heard a crash—the fall of a burning stair-case—far below.

"Quick! the roof—the scuttle—it is our only chance!" panted Hawk, groping for the ladder leading to the trap-door, which he was lucky enough to find. "Where are you, Nixey?"

"Here at your side, boss!"

"Up with you, and lift the trap! You are the spryest. Quick!"

Nixey had instantly ascended.

"I can't budge the trap, boss!" he called down. "It must be fastened on the outside."

"Nonsense!" And Hawk darted up to his assistance.

Just as he exerted all his force ineffectually, however, a demoniac voice from the upper side of the scuttle smote their ears.

"Trapped at last!" it cried. "Now, fools, roast and fry in your cage, while Olga and her secret survive for me alone!"

CHAPTER XI.

FIRE!—AN UNDERGROUND QUEST.

FOR an instant, Hawk was appalled at the imminence and horrible nature of the new danger that environed him and his friends, but it was only for an instant.

"Nixey," said he, "it seems to me I saw an ax in the old German's kitchen. Do you think you might fetch it?"

A choking sound of assent was his only answer as the brave urchin slid down the ladder, and crept away on all fours.

"Where are you, Seagrave?" Hawk next called out.

"Directly below you," was the gasping reply. "God help us! Five minutes of this atmosphere will—Ha!"

He was cut short by a crash of breaking panes, followed by a shower of water, while a

murmurous war arose to them from the street below.

"Hurrah!" shouted Hawk; "the fire laddies have got on their streams. There is yet hope for us!"

Here he applied his shoulder to the scuttle with a force that caused it to bend and creak, but without giving way.

"Ha, ha, ha!" again rung out the demoniac voice from the roof. "Hope on, thou fool, but there is no hope! I smothered hope to death when I fastened down this trap with screws and rivets, after firing the stairways in twenty places! Ha, ha, ha! You are batted under hatches, like roasting rats in a burning ship! Ha, ha, ha, my falcon! where is the hunted vulture now? Such is the triumph of Count Kotzka the Proscribed!"

The terrible voice had gradually grown fainter, indicating that the exulting fiend was consulting his own safety by taking himself off.

"Olga, my poor Olga!" murmured Seagrave, in half-stifled tones. "It is her fate, I deplore, rather than my own!"

"Never say die!" laughed out the indomitable detective, making another powerful but ineffectual assault on the scuttle. "By Jupiter! I believe I could die without a pang, if I could meet that arch-fiend once more, hand to hand and front to front!"

"Are you there yet, boss?" called out Nixey's piping voice, and there was another dash of water that slightly freshened up the air.

"Yes," replied Hawk. "Have you got the ax?"

"No; there's none there, or I would have found it. But come back into the rooms, both of you!"

"Back there! Are you crazy?"

"No, boss, but solid on the goose! Come on, I tell you! The air ain't half so thick in there, an' the water's comin' in like a river! Here I am at the bottom of the ladder! Get on your hands an' knees, an' foller me!"

He spoke so confidently that both Hawk and Seagrave lost no time in following his advice.

That it was the very best under the circumstances was soon made apparent.

As they regained the room they had quitted, which was being fairly flooded by the hose-streams from the street, a glance backward showed more than half the passage a mass of flame, which had already licked up and devoured the ladder upon which Hawk had stood but a moment before.

"Here's something of a change, anyway!" sputtered Hawk, the last one to stagger back into the room and close the door behind him. "By Jupiter! it's a Russian, Turkish and shower bath, all in one."

Though twice knocked off his feet by the rushing streams in the attempt, he at last reached a window and leaned out.

A fireman, with a three-inch nozzle in his clutch, was glued to the upper rungs of a ladder about ten feet below the window-sill.

"I say, young feller, don't think of jumpin' out!" the fireman called up. "All ain't up with yer yet!"

"I wasn't thinking of jumping out," replied Hawk, coolly. "What is that sort of pagoda on wheels down yonder in the crowd?"

"Bully fur you, colonel; you're one of the right sort!" was the hearty reply, while a shifting of the nozzle in the fireman's grip sent up a stream that ripped out the remainder of the window-sash over Hawk's head. "That pagoda down yonder's the water-tower, young man."

"When will it get to work?"

"In three minutes—just as quick as some fellers on the roof can chop holes through to give it a show—Hi, there! stand back, young feller! She's gittin' to work right this holy minute!"

Hawk had already heard vigorous blows being dealt overhead.

And now, just as he shrunk back into the center of the room where Seagrave and Nixey had remained standing, three holes were simultaneously knocked through the ceiling; and then followed such a drenching, down-rushing deluge of water as if the flood-gates of heaven had been suddenly let loose.

"Jewhillikens, boss!" cried Nixey, floundering about like a rat in a sewer, while his companions were no better off. "Do they think we're thirsty?"

"Alas for poor Mr. Schmidt's household effects!" said Hawk, essaying to look about him. "I can only hope he is insured."

Just then the end of a fire-ladder was thrust through one of the windows, and a fireman vaulted into the room.

"Saved ag'in!" he cried. "Can you-uns find your way down the way I got up by?"

Hawk's answer was a grasp of the sinewy hand, and then he sprang toward the ladder, followed by Nixey and Seagrave.

The night was cold, their garments wringing wet, and they were consequently chilled to the bone upon reaching the street, but otherwise uninjured.

"Have you any idea how the fire occurred?" asked a fire marshal, as our hero stepped off the ladder. "What! Hawk Heron, is it you?"

"I only know," he replied, "that, while I was

trying to break through the scuttle, some villain on the roof called out that he had batted it fast, after kindling a fire in twenty places on the stairways."

He then made a significant sign to his two companions, and darted off through the crowd, they following.

Under his guidance, they presently brought up in a private room at the rear of a small drinking saloon.

Here they were uninterrupted, with a warm stove to keep them company.

"What next?" asked Seagrave, after they had discussed their adventure and got their clothes dried.

"The exploration of the tunnel, as a matter of course," said Hawk.

"What! to-night?"

"To be sure!"

"But—"

"Why, what other time could serve us as well, especially if that superlative monster, Kotzka, failed to linger in the crowd, and so cannot know of our escape just yet?"

"That's so, boss," said Nixey. "He felt so sure of havin' us toasted, that I don't believe he hung around in the crowd."

"Even were it otherwise," said Hawk, calmly, "there is no time like the present."

Ralph Seagrave gazed at the detective in unfeigned admiration.

"You must be of iron—iron will, as well as body!" said he. "Of course, you can count me with you."

The preparations were soon made. The proprietor of the place, with whom Hawk was well acquainted, provided them with some flasks of brandy, together with a large supply of sandwiches, which Hawk thought might prove acceptable amid the damp recesses of the secret tunnel, and they at last set out.

Nixey was the guide for the time being.

He at last led them up a dismal street that rose steeply from Third avenue in an easterly direction.

Lofty tenement-houses of a mean class rose uninterruptedly on the right, or southern, side of this street, but, on the opposite side, a similar row of buildings was intersected midway by a rough precipice of natural rock, which had not yet been blasted away.

Perched on its lofty edge was a miserable white-washed shanty, of a type that still flourishes, along with numerous goats and geese, in the upper wards of the city, while a small livery stable occupied the first floor of one of the tenement-houses at its side.

"The glory of this here place, gents," said Nixey, pausing with a glow of pride at the foot of the bluff, "has departed."

"True," said Hawk, smiling. "I remember when it covered several blocks, and was known to the police as 'Sebastopol.'"

"Right you are, boss, an' they might just as well have dubbed it Gibraltar, too, seein' as how so many thieves and toughs defied the cops from among the hundred an' one shanties that currowed the rock-ribbed heights in them days of departed glory. I'll be with you ag'in in the shake of a sheep's tail."

The little fellow darted away as he spoke, and disappeared into the livery stable.

It was now late at night, and the street wholly deserted.

Nixey reappeared, accompanied by a rough-looking man, with a cast in his eyes, whom he addressed as Rocksey.

Between them they carried three dark-lanterns and three small crowbars.

"I hopes," said Rocksey, touching his forelock to Hawk and Seagrave, with an oblique sort of leer, "as how yer won't furgit I'm a pore but honest cuss, eff there's swag in the wind."

Hawk took a lantern and crowbar, without making any reply, as did Seagrave likewise.

"Now look here, Rocksey," said Nixey, angrily, "I'm the daisy you're under obligations to, an' if you attempt to insinuate—"

"That will do, Nixey," interposed Hawk, not unwilling to keep up a false impression as to the work in hand; "win or lose on our part, your friend's services shall be remembered."

Rocksey snorted like a horse, stamped his feet as if his fetlocks itched, and faded back into the stable.

Nixey led the way along a steep, zigzag path up the face of the rocks.

"Blast the gall of that galoot, after how I stood between him an' the cops at his last racket!" he muttered, still intent upon the stableman's leering request. "May I kiss a pig fur luck if I ever see the like!"

The fierce barking of a dog, accompanied by the rattling of a chain, in the primitive shanty inclosure, greeted them as they emerged over the top of the rocky elevation.

This was nearly as high as the towering tenements on either side.

It extended back through them a distance of two blocks, the adjoining cross street not having yet been cut through the mass.

Three other miserable shanties, likewise provided with barking dogs, were scattered here and there.

Nixey led the way to a deep fissure, half-overgrown with noisome weeds, at the side of one of

the houses, and seemingly half-filled up with broken bottles, old tomato cans and other refuse characteristic of New York squatter sovereignty.

Neither were the goats wanting, two or three of those picturesque animals lazily shifting their sleeping accommodations, as the trio of explorers picked their way down into the disagreeable crevice.

The party, having already lighted their lanterns, continued to descend slopingly till they came to the end of the cleft, where the much-broken mouth of a tunnel opened directly against the side of the building.

"Here we are, boss!" said Nixey, flashing his bull's-eye into the half-choked opening with a triumphant gesture. "Lo an' behold the door of the Toughs' Retreat, or the Cop's Puzzler, as we Short Tails used to call it by turns."

Hawk peered into the tunnel, and then deliberated as to its probable trend.

"It's course must bend considerably," said he, "or it cannot connect with the house in Melton place."

"But it does bend to the northward, boss, not more'n a hundred feet from here," said Nixey. "After that it dips down mighty deep, skirts the foundations of two old houses, in one of which them foreign lunatics what wants to burst up thrones an' murder all the crowned heads used to hold their mysterious chebangs, an' then bores along under three streets an' business blocks, right into the bow-wowels of Melton place."

"Good!" said Hawk, passing into the opening with some difficulty, followed by the others. "Nothing venture, nothing have!"

Their progress was very tedious for the first hundred feet or so, the tunnel being in places so choked with fallen stones and rubbish as to necessitate considerable labor in clearing it to one side.

But after passing the bend of which Nixey had spoken, where the passage made a steep descent, the way was much improved.

The arched roof, nevertheless, continued so low as to compel the explorers to proceed in a half-crouching attitude which was very fatiguing and the air was damp and oppressive.

They continued to advance and descend, however, slowly, but with little serious interruption.

At last, as a number of huge rats scampered off before their approach, they came to a pause as a mysterious rumbling sort of roar began to roll toward them through the tunnel, which slightly trembled.

"It's an earthquake!" gasped Seagrave, who followed last. "I once heard and felt one just like it in a Peruvian silver mine."

"Nonsense!" said Hawk. "We're more likely passing under a street, and that is the jarring rumble of some heavy wagon passing overhead."

Nixey burst into his elfish laugh.

"You're both out!" said he. "I know what it is—I bet I does!"

"Tell us, then," said Hawk.

"We must be near the house where them foreign frauds is holdin' one of their secret chebangs, an' them sounds is the enthusiastic roars of applause, as the theayter crickets say."

This, or something like it, proved to be the true explanation.

Going on a little further, the explorers began to skirt a rough, half-broken foundation wall, through which the sounds were plainly distinguished as multitudinous voices.

"Look, boss!" said Nixey, beginning to pick away part of the wall with his crowbar, but with little or no noise. "I can soon make a peep-hole, by which we can look in on 'em."

"To what end?" asked Hawk impatiently.

Nixey leaned on his crowbar, and gazed at him with a comical look of mock contempt.

"Well, now, boss," said he, "fur a lynx-eyed, hawk-billed detective, you can sweep the deck, joker included, fur downright lunkheadedness when you want to!"

"What is the matter with me now?" said Hawk, laughing.

"Why, wasn't Mr. Seagrave here attacked by foreign looneys? Weren't they set on to it by the big duffer we're runnin' down? Mayn't he, therefore, be mixed up in their 'spiracies? Ain't there a 'spiracy goin' on right behind this 'ere wall, what we might get a peep at? An' mightn't these things catch on to each to other like the links of a dog-chain?"

"Yes, they might, but most likely do not," said Hawk, giving a start. "However, go on with your work, and I'll lend you a hand."

Seagrave also assisted, and an aperture was soon effected by which they could see into a vast cellar.

It was loftily vaulted, illuminated by numerous gas-jets, and provided with rude benches, which were occupied by a noisy and excited assemblage of both sexes, but with the men greatly in the majority.

The latter appeared to be mostly foreigners, rudely dressed and in many cases with forbidding faces, though there was a scattering of well-dressed persons of an intelligent aspect.

Red flags and gaudily painted mottoes and emblems of a highly inflammatory nature draped the walls.

Facing the audience was a small stage, from

which some speaker had just retired whose Philippic had awakened the stormy plaudits that had first attracted our explorers' attention, and had not yet wholly subsided.

Just at this moment a fresh orator—a woman, young, beautiful, superbly formed, her every movement instinct with melodious grace—was ascending the platform.

"Can it be possible?" murmured Hawk, starting back. "Here at this hour, and in such company!"

It was Clarisse.

CHAPTER XII.

BURIED ALIVE.

SHE began to speak at once, in a tongue that was unfamiliar to Hawk, but with such eloquence and fire as to thrill him strangely, while the audience before her seemed to be spell-bound.

"Peerless creature!" muttered the detective. "She may be mistaken, led away by false lights, but she cannot be either ignoble or bad. What would I not give to know the purport of her silvery eloquence?"

"I understand her every word, for she is speaking in Russian," whispered Seagrave. "Well may you admire her, my friend!"

"Why?"

"Because the purport of her impassioned speech, though in support of anarchical sentiments of which I do not approve, is of a purity and enthusiasm in keeping with her magnificent beauty."

"Ah, I can believe you! But listen. Her tones are like those of a wind-harp, interspersed with tempestuous throbings!"

Clarisse was sumptuously dressed, even glorious jewels flashing at breast, throat and ears, and she wore them as an empress born.

As she proceeded in her address, her voice and manner grew more wild and impassioned. The one at last rung through the vaulted hall with startling yet melodious distinctness, while the other attained that of an angry but still lovely pythoness invoking the vengeance of insulted deities.

Suddenly she ceased, with heaving breast, flashing eyes, her whole bright figure quivering from the excess of the stormy emotion that had swayed her.

Then the assemblage burst forth in semi-delirious plaudits, the roar of which, in comparison with that which had preceded it, was as heaven's artillery to the lapping of summer waves upon an island beach.

Tumultuous and hoarse as it was, with but a gesture of her shining hand she presently silenced it, and, retiring gracefully from the platform, gave way to a fresh orator.

Her successor was Kotzka, whose appearance, magnificently dressed and covered with glittering regalia, was hailed with only less enthusiasm than had greeted Clarisse.

Without preface, Kotzka at once burst into a thundering harangue, likewise in Russian, which had a marked effect upon his hearers.

"Why, this is astounding!" whispered Seagrave in our hero's ear. "This man's address is directed almost solely to one subject—that is against you!"

"Against me?" murmured Hawk. "You must be raving!"

"No, as I live! though Kotzka is, or rather ranting, against you at a tremendous rate!"

"What is he saying in substance?"

"He is holding you, Hawk Heron, up to the Order's special attention and vengeance, as a secret agent of the Czar's representative in this country for the identification of the prominent Nihilist exiles, emissaries and apostles here."

"I begin to comprehend the villain's tactics. Does he go into particulars?"

"Yes; he says that you are in constant communication with Count Rudovski, the Russian consul in New York, whom you keep thoroughly informed as to the movements of all Nihilist, Anarchist and Socialistic societies in America!"

"Oh, the deep, the designing knave! Why, I never even heard of the consul's name before!"

"He also declares that you have branded him as the author of the Gotham Flats tragedy solely for the purpose of enlisting the New York detective authorities in your relentless pursuit of him, Kotzka, the Master of this secret Order, in the interests of the Czar's government."

"Oho!"

"Wait, now. As he is drawing to a close, I will translate the concluding words of Kotzka's harangue as he utters them, and you can judge of their effect by what follows."

The concluding words of Kotzka's inflammatory address, as whisperingly translated in Hawk Heron's ear, were as follows:

"Comrades, compatriots, brothers in oath and fidelity! will you then tamely submit to this Hawk Heron's persecution of your chief and disruption of your Brotherhood? No; I feel that you will not—that you will array cunning against his cunning, force against his force, violence against his violence, till you have abolished him from the face of the earth he contaminates! But I must warn you that he combines the wisdom of the serpent with the boldness of

the falcon, which he appropriates as his emblem and his motto. Such is his power that I shouldn't wonder if even now he might be familiarizing himself with the nature of our secret proceedings here. But no matter; I feel that I have sufficiently unmasked the treacherous designs of this Hawk Heron—this *pseudo* police detective, but actual secret agent of the Czar's despotism—to mark him henceforth as the chief object of your relentless pursuit and un pitying vengeance!"

The furious effect of this ingeniously delusive harangue was indescribable.

The auditors were fairly frantic, and Hawk Heron's name was vociferated by hundreds of stentorian voices, and coupled with every expression of detestation and hatred of which the dialects of continental Europe are capable.

In fact, our onlookers from the tunnel aperture were so much occupied with observing these demonstrations as not to notice a certain ruffianly figure hastily disappear from the hall after receiving some whispered instructions from Kotzka.

When the hubbub had subsided, some closing ceremonies were had, including a recapitulation of secret signs and passwords, to which our hero was specially attentive, after which the place was suddenly thrown into darkness, and the strange convention was at an end.

Hawk was the first to retire from the peephole.

"Forewarned forearmed!" said he. "We now know what new perils to expect."

"Yes; and how to prepare for them," said Seagrave.

"Come," continued Hawk, "the next step is to build up this breach again."

The wisdom of this precaution was sufficiently apparent, and the task was soon effected.

"Now one more precaution before we proceed," he continued.

"What is it?" said Seagrave.

"Name it, boss!" said Nixey.

"An oath of mutual secrecy as to what we have seen and overheard, with regard to outsiders."

The oath was taken.

"Forward once more!"

The trend of the tunnel dipped no longer, but ascended slightly as it led them away from the foundation wall right on through the bowels of the earth.

Presently, however, they began to skirt the outer wall of which Nixey had advised them.

"We ain't more'n two hundred yards from the man-hole in Melton place now," said the boy.

"Good!" said Hawk; "but how oddly the formation of the tunnel has altered!"

At this point, indeed, the right-hand wall of the tunnel showed dangerous breaks in many places, causing deep fissures to appear at irregular intervals.

"These 'ere breaks didn't used to be here, boss!" called out Nixey. "Hello! what was that?"

They had left the second house-wall some fifty feet behind, when Nixey, who was last in the line, made this exclamation.

It was instantly echoed by Seagrave, who for the time being was in the lead, and then Hawk caught it up.

"We're being dogged!" cried Hawk. "A figure just now flitted past me, and vanished into this fissure."

"No, boss!" cried Nixey, turning, and flashing his lantern to the rear; "it flitted past me, too, an' vanished somewhere back yonder."

"That's strange!" called out Seagrave, flashing his lantern forward; "I'd almost swear it slipped by me, and darted off yonder. Pah! I smell something like a fuse burning."

"So do I, somewhere back this way," cried Nixey.

"Uncertainty won't do in this complication," said Hawk, greatly puzzled. "Seagrave, run on ahead, making sure of every fissure you pass. Nixey, do you retrace your steps for the same purpose. I will attend to this deep fissure right here, into which I feel sure the shadow darted."

"All right!" came from both his companions, as they branched away from either side, leaving him alone.

"Be on your guard at every step!" shouted Hawk, as a farewell precaution. "Mistrust the veriest shadow!"

If any response was made, they were now too far away for the responses to reach him.

Grasping his revolver with one hand, and holding his lantern on high with the other, he was advancing stoopingly into the fissure.

Suddenly a loud explosion, followed by a crash, from the direction in which Seagrave had disappeared, caused him to start back.

Then came a similar explosion, accompanied by a like crash, from the direction of Nixey's retreat.

Instantly, then, the sickening, suffocating smell of burned gunpowder in a damp, confined space.

Then a chuckling, triumphant laugh, and Hawk had barely time to set away his lantern in safety as an uncouth figure, which he recognized as that of the ruffianly Manchester Tibbs, rushed upon him from the mouth of the fissure, knife in hand.

The single hurried shot that Hawk managed to fire was without effect.

The next instant he was grappled, and then ensued a brief, but desperate, life-and-death struggle in the semi-darkness of the now stifling passage.

Brief, because, after the first shock, Hawk's superior address asserted itself, and, avoiding two vicious knife-thrusts delivered with lightning-like rapidity, he got in a second shot, which pierced his antagonist's breast, and stretched him helpless on the ground.

The next instant Hawk was bending over him, flashing his lantern into the fallen man's face.

An enormously broad-brimmed slouched hat, which had partly concealed his features, had fallen off, and now the unmistakable grayness that precedes dissolution was stealing over them.

"What! is it so bad?" said Hawk; "but I see no blood."

With a feeble effort, the ruffian tore open his blouse and shirt, revealing a small round hole over the heart.

"It's bleedin' in'ardly," he gasped. "I feel it tricklin', tricklin', tricklin' all through me! Young feller, you've done for me!"

"But in sheer self-defense!" said the detective. "Why did you attack me? I never wronged you."

"You never did—I'm sorry enough now, young feller! Oh, a curse on that 'ere Russian! What have I ever got fur doin' his dirty murderin' work? Blows an' kicks! kicks an' blows! But he held me to my oath, curse him!"

The words came disjointedly and with increasing feebleness.

"Ha!" exclaimed Hawk; "the Russian—Kotzka? You were his minion?"

A gesture of assent.

"And Blithers, my friend—what connection had you with him?"

A surprised look followed by a smile, but no answer.

"So! You were meditating treachery to the Russian, and so communicated with Blithers, or made overtures to that end? I think I understand."

"You do, eh?"

"But is it not so? Speak!"

"Young feller, I have an oath! There's lots of blood on Bob Tibbs's soul, but there'll never be oath-breakin'."

"What!" exclaimed Hawk, hopelessly; "am I buried alive here—to die slowly, horribly, and unavenged?"

"Yes, young feller, an' with only a cellar wall 'twixt you an' the Russian, your deadly foe! 'Twas my work! I'm sorry, but it's too late fur that. Furgive! I feel I'm goin'!"

The words came so brokenly and huskily as to be hardly intelligible.

"What do you mean?" cried Hawk. "Is there yet a chance for me?"

The dying man made a half-negative sign, and was then seized with a convulsive fit of coughing, for the air was almost insupportable for the soundest of lungs.

"Another word—one more, I beseech you!" cried Hawk, wildly. "Have I a chance to escape?"

"Perhaps, if—if—that cellar-wall—that is—"

Another convulsion, choking the words in his throat, and then Manchester Tibbs fell back a corpse.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE PIT OF FIRE AND STEEL.

AROUSING himself from his despair, Hawk lost no time in assuring himself of the full extent of his situation.

It was simply appalling.

The bombs that had been exploded in the track of both Seagrave and Nixey had brought down not only the tunnel's arched roof in immense sections, but also tons of other debris.

He was completely caged within a stretch of about sixty feet, both ends of which were choked up by masses that might require hours of toil to remove.

Long before those hours should have passed, he would doubtless succumb to the terrible atmosphere, which was already nearly suffocating.

Then came, in spite of his own situation, the wild conjecture as to the fate of his companions.

Had they got beyond the jarring influence of the bombs before the explosion occurred, or had one or both been buried beneath those ponderous masses?

Now at one end of his tunnel-dungeon, and then at the other, he called long and loudly upon their names, but without eliciting a response.

Naturally enough, the horrors of his own situation soon engrossed him altogether.

He at last stood gazing alternately at the dead man and at that portion of the tunnel wall formed by the cellar foundation.

Suddenly there was a gleam of hope.

The cellar wall appeared solidly constructed, but he might yet pick his way through it with his sharp crowbar, and he had been assured that Kotzka, his enemy, was just beyond it.

Then he remarked that the ruffian, whose dead

body lay before him, had recently effected a considerable improvement in his garb.

The clothing of the body was rough and cheap, but new and clean, while the great-brimmed sombrero would go far to finish off a disguise.

"I have it!" said Hawk. "I shall first assume this dead wretch's garb over my own. Then, if I can cut my way through yonder wall, my counterfeiting powers may enable me to pierce some new penetralia of my subtle foe, even to the very heart of his undoing."

With our hero, to determine was to act, to plan was to execute.

In a few moments he had assumed the dead ruffian's outer garments over his own.

Then, before donning the sombrero, he grimed and blackened his face in as near an imitation as he could of the swarthy and forbidding features that were stilled forever.

Then he set to work at the wall.

After an hour of torturing labor, a breach was effected.

Retaining his crowbar, he gave a sigh of relief as he stepped into what the dim rays of his lantern revealed as a vast cellar.

A brief exploration showed it to be empty, save for some cases and casks heaped at one end.

There was an inclosed space, like a spacious flue, at the side opposite the breach he had made.

At one side of this flue ascended a rude flight of wooden steps.

He began to climb them.

Half-way to the top he came to a small door, evidently opening toward the flue.

It yielded to his grasp.

Opening it, he threaded a short corridor, opened a panel and looked in and down.

Then he started back with a thrill of horror, such as he had seldom before experienced.

Had he gazed into an abyss of the infernal regions the effect could scarcely have been more horrifying.

The flue, as he had thought it, was a pit of fire!

The walls and bottom were not only gilded with dazzling fire, but were likewise bristling with innumerable bayonet points.

Overpowering sulphurous fumes saluted his nostrils.

From somewhere in the depths issued demoniac groans, combined with the clanking of chains.

Hawk reeled back, closing the friendly panel.

"What awful mystery am I on the threshold of?" he muttered.

Regaining the steps, he continued the ascent.

At the top, another small opening in another direction admitted him to a carpeted corridor, which conducted him to the foot of a winding staircase.

Ascending this and passing through another door, he found himself in a broad, illuminated and superbly-furnished passage.

A closed door was at either end.

From one of these there came the sound of voices in angry dispute.

These voices he recognized with a start.

The purport of their discussion, which he could plainly distinguish, was even more startling.

"I tell you," said one voice, which was that of Clarisse, "I will not have a hair of the girl injured!"

"But," said the other, the hated voice of Kotzka, "if Olga's prison should be traced by that infernal detective—"

"Hawk Heron, you mean?"

"Yes."

"But you told me you had burnt him to death."

"He escaped, curse him!"

"What?"

There was a joyful ring in the utterance of this word that caused Hawk to palpitate with pleasure.

"Yes," Kotzka's voice went on, "the man's a salamander. I saw him descend a fire-ladder, uninjured."

"Thank God!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"No matter."

"But I insist on knowing!"

"You insist!"

"Ay!"

"Count Kotzka, remember that you are my master only in a political sense."

"Remember your oath!"

"Ha! Do you remember it, too, Count! If I only thought—"

"What?"

"That you had descended to *private* crime, independent of the Order's commands, by Heaven—"

"Well, go on!"

"No, I shall not."

"But you have either said too little or too much."

"No more; you know *me*."

"In what way?"

"As a stainless woman, who merely aims at heroic distinction in the cause in which my sire laid down his life."

"But you forget that I hold you in my per-

sonal power by the one secret of your past, which is in my possession alone."

"Forget it! Am I likely to?"

"I should think not."

"But for that, would I conspire with such as you?"

"Woman!"

Kotzka's voice thundered forth the last word, and ended in a sort of snarl.

A scornful laugh was his response.

"Let us return to our first subject," said Kotzka's voice, in a calmer tone. "There is no reasoning with you, Clarisse."

"As you please, then."

"Well, then, I do not wish to destroy the girl, unless upon necessity. But if her prison up here in the tower should be discovered—"

Hawk gave another start.

"What!" he muttered, joyfully: "Olga confined here—here in this very house!"

"No matter," he heard Clarisse interrupt.

"Not a hair of her head shall be injured."

"You say so?"

"I swear it!"

"Ha!"

"Yes. You have partly persuaded me that Olga's abduction was necessary to the cause. I submit. But I shall defend her life as I would my sister's."

Kotzka burst out in some furious retort in Russian.

Clarisse answered, and the dispute was continued for some time in the same tongue.

Then there was a movement as if they might be coming out into the passage.

Hawk hurried to the door at the other end, so as to seem to have just entered by it.

He had left his lantern on the stair, but still retained his crowbar, and his revolver and dagger were within easy reach.

Just as he turned, and began to advance, Kotzka, followed by Clarisse, stepped into the passage.

Both were splendidly dressed, as at the secret convocation.

"What!" exclaimed Kotzka; "you here, Tibbs?"

"Ay, maister," replied Hawk, scraping his foot, and imitating Tibbs's voice and manner to perfection, but taking care to keep on his hat.

Followed still by Clarisse, Kotzka advanced, observing him narrowly.

"How did you get here?" said he.

"What's the odds how, maister, so long as the job you set me onto is did?"

"Ha! the tunnel?"

"Is bu'sted up, or rather down!"

"And the detective?"

"Is under the ruins, with my bullet in his nob."

"You shall be suitably rewarded," said Kotzka, after a long pause. "Remain here till I return."

He retraced his steps, re-entered the room at the other end of the passage, closing the door behind him.

Clarisse moved toward the *pseudo* Tibbs, her eyes sparkling with excitement.

"Hawk Heron, I know you," said she, simply.

Hawk gave a surprised start.

"Yes," she continued, "your disguise is clever, but I penetrated it at a glance."

"Well," said Hawk, "you will not betray me?"

"Indeed!" with a hard laugh.

"No."

"Why will I not betray you?"

Hawk snatched off the sombrero, and looked her full in the face.

"Because I love you!"

A rich color mounted into her cheeks. It was succeeded by a troubled look.

"You are in deadly peril," said she, "for Kotzka has likewise recognized you."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes; his manner and words were merely a pretense."

"Well, if I am in a trap, I can fight my way out."

"You cannot! This is a fastness of desperate men. A stamp of Kotzka's foot would bring them upon you in swarms. Impossible!"

"Then you will save me."

"I! But if it be not in my power? However—"

She started back, for just then Kotzka burst again into the passage, with the aspect of a demon.

"Oho! Hawk Heron!" he roared; "so you would venture into the lion's den? Be it so, for this time your doom is certain!"

Hawk threw off his hat and twirled his crowbar over his head.

But he was entrapped!

At a stamp of Kotzka's foot, armed men started into life at every hand, almost from the very floor at his feet.

"Seize him, bind him!" thundered Kotzka; "he is a spy, a traitor!"

There was a wild and desperate struggle while it lasted, which was scarcely a minute.

As the conspirators precipitated themselves upon him, Hawk laid about him with telling effect, but he was quickly overpowered.

Then Clarisse's voice rung out over the hubbub like a clarion.

"Bind and gag that man, if you must," she cried, "but harm him not on pain of my displeasure!"

"Woman!" yelled Kotzka, in a white rage; "dare you dispute my authority here? The man is a spy, a traitor!"

"He is neither, and I'll answer for it!" she retorted, defiantly. "Fellow-conspirators—"

Several of the men interposed, and, as well as Hawk could make out—for he was now bound and prostrate—they were trying to persuade her to be quiet.

At length they seemed to succeed.

Then there was a confusion of voices in a foreign tongue.

But Hawk was meanwhile busily but silently cutting his bonds with a tiny knife-blade, which he always kept concealed in his sleeve for just such an emergency.

He had been deprived of his crowbar, but his revolver and dagger were yet available.

Suddenly, finding himself free, he bounded to his feet, pistol and knife in hand.

What did that instant of liberty reveal to him?

Clarisse had disappeared.

The conspirators were grouped about their chief, and, excepting him, they now wore masks.

Taking advantage of their surprise, Hawk fired his first shot full at Kotzka's breast.

Then he sprang among the group, playing both weapons, right and left, for all they were worth.

There was another wild struggle.

"Upon him!" yelled Kotzka, who had for some mysterious reason escaped the shot. "Down with him! but spare his life, on your own lives—spare him for the torturing doom!"

Our hero was once more speedily overpowered.

"Whither shall we drag him, master?" asked a voice, in English.

The answer curdled the blood in Hawk Heron's veins.

"Whither!" roared Kotzka, in a terrible voice; "whither but to the pit of fire and steel?"

Hawk's eyes were then bandaged as he lay helpless.

Then he felt himself borne swiftly away.

His next sensation, after a halt had been made, was as of hooks or grappels being fastened between his shoulders.

Then he felt himself hoisted from his feet, and dangling in the air.

Near at hand sounded a roaring and crackling of flames, and he again experienced the sickening sulphurous smell.

"Now," cried the terrible voice, "swing back the brazen doors, and float him down into the pit of fire and steel! Ha, ha, ha! Hawk Heron, you must indeed be more than salamander if you survive this torturing test!"

Simultaneously with the words, there was a clang of opening doors, Hawk's limbs were unbound, and the bandage was torn from his eyes.

Then he found himself suspended, face downward, literally swimming in space, over the horrible pit.

Horror mastered him.

The walls around him were glittering with fire and bristling with bayonet points.

Far below yawned a gulf even more appalling in its suggestions.

"Stand by the running gear," continued the terrible voice from somewhere overhead, "and await the order to cut the rope!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE IRON TOMB.

THE rope was not cut, however, and Hawk remained suspended over the pit.

This fact and one other served to reinstate his courage.

The other fact was that, while the sulphurous fumes rising from the glittering depths were almost overpowering, there was no corresponding heat.

Still our hero's situation was sufficiently mysterious and dreadful to have appalled the stoutest heart.

Presently he began to be swung violently to and fro, in a manner that threatened every instant to impale him on one or more of the bayonets protruding from the sides.

Then the terrible voice rung out once more from overhead.

"Hawk Heron," it cried, "in consideration of that past in which you were not the enemy you now are, your life may still be spared, on one condition. Do you hear?"

"Yes, I hear," Hawk managed to gasp out in response.

"Swear, then, to give over your fell pursuit of Kotzka, the Proscribed!"

Hawk vouchsafed no answer.

"Swear this instant, or you shall be precipitated into the fiery, bristling gulf yawning to receive you. Swear!"

Our hero felt that his life trembled in the balance, but he was indomitable.

"Never!" he exclaimed.

The oscillations now became yet more violent.

But in one of these, which brought him almost

against the bayonets, a voice—the voice of Clarisse—whispered encouragingly from somewhere at the side.

"Courage!" it said; "the pit but blazes with phosphorus, the bayonets are but shams—these are but stage-horrors in the initiative ceremonies of our Order."

"One more chance is left you," continued the terrible voice. "Swear!"

"Never!" repeated Hawk, of course more stoutly than before.

The pit suddenly became pitch-dark, and he felt himself whirled up in the void.

Then he was once more in the small room from which he had been shot out over the pit.

But before he could take much note of his surroundings, he was again bound and blindfolded, while he felt the grapples unhooked from between his shoulders.

"Master, what shall we do with him?" he heard one of the conspirators say in a low voice. "He already knows too many of our secrets. Death alone can effectually silence him."

"Not yet," he heard Kotzka's voice respond. "I may be able to make use of him before consigning him to the inevitable."

"But he has murdered our servant, the Englishman, Tibbs. Rudolph has found the dead body in the tunnel, with a bullet in the breast."

"True."

"There must be blood for blood, master. It is our law."

"Fear not but that it will be maintained, brother. How fared it with this enemy's companions in the tunnel?"

"Both were killed, master. The bodies of both have been unearthed, shapeless and mutilated beyond recognition."

It seemed to Hawk that this whispered colloquy was carried on with no intention of his overhearing it.

This last announcement, therefore, caused him the most poignant grief, but he held his peace.

"Capital!" the voice of Kotzka went on; "thus you see we can afford to defer our revenge with regard to this enemy."

"But, master, in the two struggles below, he fought like a madman—five of our brethren have been seriously disabled by his terrific blows."

"Patience, I tell you! A torturing death shall ultimately be his reward."

"Master, we submit."

"Take him up among you, and bear him hence."

Hawk, who was as helpless as a log, felt himself taken up by numerous powerful hands.

"Whither, master?"

There was something appallingly suggestive in the hollow-voiced response:

"To the coffin-cell—the iron tomb."

Hawk instantly felt himself borne away, and up, up an apparently interminable flight of steps.

Presently, however, there was a halt.

Then there was a clanging of bolts and bars, as he was violently thrust forward the bandage and cords were torn from his eyes and limbs, there was another clanging of bolts and bars, and he found himself incarcerated in a strange dungeon.

It was dimly illuminated in a mysterious manner.

This illumination and a brief examination showed him that he was the inmate of a perfectly coffin-shaped cell, about ten feet long by six wide and six high, the walls, ceiling and floor of which were of smooth, rivetless and apparently immovable iron plates.

At one end—the end corresponding with the foot of the coffin—there was a narrow, heavily-barred window, having a sort of overhang that caused it to look downward as well as outward.

With this exception, there was not an aperture of any sort, not even the slightest chink, to relieve the cold, black, forbidding bareness of the iron casing.

Hawk's minutest examination could not even discover the outlines of the door by which he had been thrust into the cell.

But the mysterious light revealed at last one object that was gratefully suggestive to his exhausted frame.

This was a rather comfortably provided straw pallet, the only sign of furniture the cell contained.

"There's nothing like a good level-headed rest and sleep to prepare oneself for the unknown perils of the future," said Hawk, half-aloud, as he rapidly divested himself of part of his clothing. "God bless the man who first invented sleep," said good Sancho Panza, and so say I."

He threw himself upon the pallet, drew its coverings around him, and was soon wrapped in deep sleep.

When he awoke, the sun was shining into his cell so broadly that he conjectured he must have slept far into the day.

Beside his pallet, on the floor of the cell, was a tray containing a hot and substantial breakfast.

Rolling up the pallet so as to form a sort of seat, Hawk lost no time in taking the tray across his knees, and disposing of its contents with a vigorous appetite.

While thus engaged, and at the same time reflecting upon his situation, he broke in half a

French roll, and a twisted piece of paper fell out of it.

"Aha!" thought Hawk, eagerly smoothing it out; "I am not wholly deserted, it seems."

The paper contained writing, to the following effect:

"Since they have you caged at last in the Iron Tomb, I fear you are beyond my aid. *Alas! there is no sham, no merely theatrical horror, in your present situation.* However, hope on, and on no account, as you value your life, attempt to communicate with any one in the street below. CLARISSE."

There was certainly not much satisfaction to be derived from this communication.

However, he concealed it upon his person, finished his breakfast, and then resumed such of his own garments as he had discarded, leaving the disguise he had worn lying on the floor.

Then, standing on the bundled pallet, he for the first time looked through the bars of his cell window.

He first looked down into a street that was far, far below him.

This, together with the fact that the level outlook extended high over the roofs and chimneys of neighboring buildings of great height, afforded him some idea as to the extraordinary altitude of his cell.

"Why, I must be caged up here fully a hundred feet in the air!" he soliloquized. "Now let me take my municipal bearings, and see if I can form some idea as to the nature and locality of my prison-house."

He did so, casting his eyes in every possible direction for landmarks.

At last a look of intelligence sprung into his face, and he slapped his thigh.

"I have it!" he exclaimed to himself. "I am in the enormous brewery building of Poppenheim & Co., that was half-burnt out two years ago, and subsequently abandoned altogether for more commodious quarters up in Morrisania."

He paused, and reflected.

"Yes, there can be no doubt of it," he continued. "These socialist conspirators, these throne-upsetters, have doubtless leased the abandoned premises for the prosecution of their solemn mummeries and impracticable schemes."

Another pause, and then, with renewed satisfaction:

"Ha! And this theory explains the tower prison of Olga, that I got a hint of from Kotzka's stormy conversation with Clarisse. There was just such a tower—a clock tower—on the northwestern angle of the old brewery, and which must even now be directly over my head. Heavens, to think of it! Olga in captivity, and almost over my head! Oh, to speak to her, or even look up at the place in which she is confined!"

The window formed a deep embrasure.

He partly climbed into this, and strove to turn his gaze aloft, but, the window itself being a sort of overhang, this was impossible.

Hawk cast his eyes anxiously back into his coffin-shaped cell.

"I have a watch-spring saw in my sleeve," he thought, "with which, were I sure of not being secretly watched, I could soon make light of these iron bars. However," despondently, "what could that avail me at this tremendous height, and with the roof above perhaps even more inaccessible than *terra firma*?"

He returned to the interior of his ominous cell, and seating himself on his pallet, gave himself up to bitter and despondent reflections, which lasted for hours.

Presently he roused himself to remark certain tokens of the day's decline.

"Why should I heed Clarisse's warning?" he thought, with sudden renewed energy. "A truce to it! I will apprise some one in the street below of the horrors of my position."

Clambering once more partly into the embrasure, he again looked down.

How deep, deep down it seemed.

A couple of teams were passing along the narrow street, and, oh, joy! there was a policeman standing on the sidewalk almost directly beneath the casement.

Hawk leaped back into the cell, reseated himself, and began to pencil a message on the back of the paper Clarisse had conveyed to him.

His back was to the window.

He had not written six words before a rapid darkening of his light caused him to turn and look up.

He started to his feet in consternation.

The entire cell was moving noiselessly, smoothly along the wall of masonry, against which it abutted.

In a moment, the light of the window was blotted out.

Then the cell came to a pause, leaving its inmate in total darkness.

Hawk sunk back upon his pallet-seat, for the first time almost completely unnerved, panic-stricken.

The darkness that had supervened was absolute—a veritable blackness of darkness.

He remained literally cowering in it for a period which seemed an age.

At last, however, he became aware of a light scratching sound on the wall of his cell nearest which he was sitting.

He listened attentively, and then made a slight

noise by altering his attitude. Then there came to his ears through the iron wall, a low, but incisive voice.

"For the moment you are unwatched, and I can communicate with you," was the burden of that voice. "Can you hear me?"

"Ha!" exclaimed Hawk, starting up in the darkness; "it is Clarisse!"

CHAPTER XV.

DUNGEON WHISPERS.

"YES, it is I, Clarisse," continued the voice. "But bend down closely to this side of the cell, and beware that you do not elevate your voice to that pitch again."

"Speak on, then," said Hawk, following her instructions. "In the first place, God bless you for coming!"

"Thanks! But did you not get my note?"

"I did get it."

"Why, then, did you disregard its solemn warning?"

"Did I so?"

"Yes, with regard to attempting communication with the street below."

"Ah, yes; but the solitude was becoming a torture!"

"Do you find it any less tormenting, with the addition of darkness?"

"No; but a thousand, a million times worse!"

"Let the penalty you have incurred, then, make you more careful in the future—that is, if much of any future be vouchsafed you."

An inexpressible sadness invested the concluding words.

"Clarisse, what do you mean?"

"Alas! I fear for you—I fear!"

"Heavens! but are you in earnest?"

"In deadly earnest! Alas! out of that iron sepulcher in which you are now entombed no prisoner ever yet—but I can say no more!"

"But are you mad, Clarisse? Speak, I entreat you!"

"In the first place, swear!"

"To what?"

"To never injure, by word or deed, any member of the Order, into whose mysteries you have accidentally obtained a slight insight."

"But Kotzka is a member of that Order."

"Ay, and a great one."

"What! and you would have me include him—the monster criminal; the world's arch-enemy, as well as my own—in that sweeping immunity?"

The answer came very faintly, but it was unmistakable.

"Yes."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Hawk, indignantly.

"Why, Clarisse, you rave! The man is a murderer! I hope to prove him a criminal of unparalleled iniquity!"

Then there was a sudden eagerness in the response.

"Ah! only prove him that—apart from the interests of the Order—and you are at liberty to exclude him from the oath's protection I ask for."

Hawk reflected a moment.

"I engage to do more than that," said he.

"I engage to prove him a traitor to the Order itself."

"Ah! if you might but do that."

"Doubt me not. With this reservation, Clarisse, I will take the oath you require."

"What will you swear by?"

"By what has become to me the sacreddest thing on earth."

"And that is—"

"My love for you!"

There was a long pause. When she spoke again it was very gently.

"You swear, then?"

"I do."

"Good! I have registered the oath."

"Where?"

"In my heart."

Hawk gave a joyous cry.

"Clarisse, do you really mean it? Ah, this is happiness!"

"Listen: Now that you are in the iron tomb, you are beyond my immediate aid. I can only watch over you."

"Is there more than one secret connected with this coffin-shaped cell?"

"Yes, a fatal, a horrible one!"

"Tell it me."

"I dare not—I am oath-bound. I can only warn."

"Well, what do you warn?"

"Do not, on your life, let sleep overtake you again, even though your eyelids are as lead."

"I shall remember. What more?"

"Should the worst threaten, remember the embrasure of the window."

"But there is no longer any window."

"It will be restored to you."

"I shall remember. What more?"

"Alas! nothing. Have you no friend who might be brought to you under a pledge of secrecy?"

Hawk suddenly thought of Blithers as the friend for the emergency. But before speaking his name he wished to relieve his mind of a heavy anxiety.

"Tell me, first, Clarisse," said he, "if you

know of the fate of my late companions—Seagrave and the boy Nixey?"

"I do not."

"I overheard one of the conspirators say that they were dead—buried beneath the ruins of the tunnel."

"I think it must be true then."

A deep groan was Hawk's tribute to the memory of his friends. But his own situation was so critical as to speedily absorb all other emotions.

"There is one friend," said he, "one whom you also know, on whose assistance I might rely, if you could bring him in communication with me."

"Name him."

"Blithers, the English detective."

"Ah!"

This was said with a sigh, which came through the iron wall with such equivocal suggestiveness that Hawk started.

"What a strange alteration in your tone!" said he. "Why is it?"

"I cannot explain. But be content. I will carry your message."

"You know his address?"

"Yes. Never fear; he will not fail to respond. Hush—no more!"

"Are you going?"

"Yes; there is danger. Do not forget my warning. Farewell."

The voice died away.

Then the cell was suddenly jarred by a shock so violent that Hawk was thrown prostrate.

He was scarcely a minute in recovering himself, but by that time the cell had glided back to its former position, and the grated window was once more in view.

Night had now fallen, however, and only the solemn starlight stole into the coffin-shaped cell. It was presently illuminated by the same mysterious light that had once before served the inmate.

By this he perceived that another substantial meal had been placed on the floor of the cell.

Hawk made way with the viands without questioning the mystery of their appearance.

Then he sat in a corner, with his back to the embrasure, to patiently await further developments, and duly mindful of Clarisse's injunction against falling asleep.

He had sat thus for a long time when there suddenly came a puff of vapor into the cell, which blinded him for an instant and induced a violent fit of sneezing and coughing.

When he recovered, the atmosphere was again uncontaminated, and he was no longer alone in the cell.

A powerful figure, gagged, blindfolded and with the arms pinioned behind the back, stood before him, attempting to communicate by ludicrous bodily contortions.

Companionship in his solitude was an unlooked-for boon.

Hawk sprung forward, with the new-comer's name on his lips:

"Blithers—Jack Blithers!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE IRON SHROUD.

"BLITHERS," for he it was, continued his eloquent contortions until Hawk hastened to relieve him of his gag, the blindfolding bandage and the pinioning cords.

"Gad!" exclaimed "Blithers," snapping his eyes and taking in his odd surroundings with a great sigh of relief; "in what sort of the devil's own pickle do I find you, my boy?"

"In such a one that you can't imagine how glad I am to see you!" cried Hawk.

He seized "Blithers's" hand and wrung it for about the twentieth time.

Seeing no seat other than the improvised one Hawk had occupied, "Blithers" sat down on the floor, leaning his back against the wall.

"Well, it is a rummy sort of crib, you know," said he, still apparently all amazement. "And let me tell you, my boy, to oblige no one but yourself would I have submitted to the conditions imposed upon my seeking you out."

"Clarisse brought you my message at your hotel, then?"

"Yes; but it was only after I got in the carriage she had in waiting that I submitted to be tied and gagged as you saw, after first taking a frightful oath to secrecy. Two villainous-looking rascals in the coach attended to the mysteries, my boy. But here I am, at last."

Without more ado, Hawk eagerly explained his situation and the adventures which had led to it.

"Blithers" drew a long face.

"Wonderful!" he commented. "Romantic, too! Why, it beats anything I ever heard of even in London, where we have these foreign fanatics in shoals! What do you want me to do?"

"In the first place, tell me if you have seen nothing of Nixey?"

"Why, no! And from what you have told me, the boy must have been killed, together with the other chap who was with you in that infernal tunnel."

Hawk groaned.

He had hoped, almost against hope, to receive some sort of contradiction of that fatal presumption, but now he could hope no longer.

"Blithers," I believe you to be my friend," said he, at last.

"My boy, put it right there!" said Blithers, holding out his hand, with his heartiest smile of sympathy.

Hawk placed his hand in the broad palm, which at once closed on it with a fervent pressure.

"What do you advise?" asked Hawk.

"Blithers" reflected for a moment.

"In your present predicament," said he, "or let me say *our* predicament, for what with their oaths of secrecy and all that sort of thing, these desperate rascals have mixed me up with it, there is only one of two things I can advise."

"What are they?"

"Blithers" sunk his voice to the lowest whisper.

"First and foremost, let me go to Headquarters as soon as I am at liberty, and give away the whole situation to your chief."

"But your oath to secrecy?"

"To the winds with all oaths, my boy, where a friend's life is at stake!"

"Thanks. But there are other objections to such a course."

"What are they?"

"In the first place, I have sworn in my own heart to run my man to earth without the assistance of my brother detectives."

"Pshaw! professional pride!"

"In the next place, such a course would merely accelerate my murder at the hands of Kotzka and his fellow-fanatics, or his dupes. Oath-bound and enthusiastic as they are, they take no account of legal consequences."

"Ah! there is something in that."

"Thirdly and lastly, this Kotzka is likewise your man, without a doubt—the great forger you are on here from Scotland Yard for the special purpose of running down."

"Yes; I no longer have any doubt of that."

"Well, such a course as you propose would undoubtedly lose you your prey, while depriving me of mine."

"But I really don't care for that, my boy, so long as I get you out of this infernal scrape," said Blithers, after a pause. "It will hurt me professionally, but let it go."

The apparent magnanimity with which these words were spoken touched Hawk nearly, and again he wrung "Blithers's" hand.

"Say no more of notifying the police," said he. "That course is out of the question."

"All right," said Blithers. "We'll drop it."

"What is your remaining piece of advice?"

Blithers fastened his eyes upon him with a peculiar look.

"I shall offer it boldly, but you will be more loth to take it than the other."

"Speak out."

"Accept the conditions which you say Kotzka has repeatedly offered you. Give over your pursuit, cry truce to vengeance, and cease to molest him!"

Hawk Heron sprung to his feet in a towering passion.

"Spare that monster!" he exclaimed, indignantly. "Cheat the law of the expiation that is its due! Outrage society by leaving that fiend unchecked, untrammelled in its midst!"

"I have said it," was the cold reply.

"But, in one or another of his diabolical impersonations, this villain has repeatedly attempted my destruction!"

"So I understand."

"He dashed me from a speeding elevated train—his bullet grazed my ear in a Houston street hallway—he hurled me down the Hotel Brunswick elevator shaft—he throttled me at my first entrance of the underground passage—it wasn't his fault that he didn't roast me to death in the Gotham Flats—he set Manchester Tibbs, armed with a revolver, knife and dynamite bombs, on the quest that destroyed my companions, and almost cost me my life—lastly, he is the author of my present appalling predicament!"

"True, every word you say!"

"He was the ruthless murderer of the widow Ashcombe!"

"Granted, if you like, though that remains to be proven."

"He is Olga's abductor!"

"Who says he isn't?"

Hawk's fury, which had kept pace with the other's cynical coolness, now reached the culminating point.

"And you would advise me," he cried, hoarsely, "to pardon all these injuries and crimes, in order to save my own wretched life?"

Beside himself, Hawk seized "Blithers" by the throat, and shook him fiercely where he sat.

"Villain!" he exclaimed; "your friendship for me is a sham—a foul pretense—none but a scoundrel could offer such cowardly advice!"

"Blithers" lumbered up to a standing attitude, and shook him off, though without losing his temper.

"Gad! my boy, but you are mad—as mad as a hatter, you know," said he. "What the deuce! You first beg for advice, and then want to murder a fellow for giving what you ask."

Hawk gradually mastered himself with a sense of shame.

"I didn't solicit the sort of advice that would involve the sacrifice of my manhood," said he, sullenly.

"I had only the hopelessness of your present quandary in view."

"Ah!"

"To be sure, my boy; and I mean everything for the best."

"Forgive me!"

"With all my heart!"

Once more they clasped hands.

"Now, just throw your eyes around you, my boy," continued "Blithers," "and say whether you are in a position to exact any better terms of your enemy than I suggested."

Hawk surveyed, for perhaps the hundredth time, the interior of his hideous, coffin-like prison.

Then, with a deep sigh, he resumed his seat on the pallet, and folded his arms hopelessly.

"Blithers" was about to continue his argument, when Hawk sadly but firmly signed him to be silent.

"No more of that," said he. "You may mean well, but it would be useless."

"You will not, then purchase your freedom, perhaps your life itself, by a compromise with your foe?"

"No!"

"You will yield in nothing whatever to conciliate him?"

"Never!"

Blithers remained silent for some moments, at the end of which he said:

"Doesn't it strike you that this cell is growing smaller—more contracted all round? Study it."

Hawk did so, and at once became excitedly interested.

The interior *had* grown more contracted.

It was as though, by some diabolical, noiselessly-working machinery, the sides had been brought a little closer together, while the ceiling had settled down to the same extent.

Hawk shuddered.

"Clarisse's warning was not without cause," he said to himself. "What refinement of torture or lingering death is preparing for me?"

"I have read of contracting dungeons in ancient times," said Blithers, reflectively, "that gradually closed in on a prisoner, slowly crushing and smothering him, until what had been his iron prison walls became at last his iron shroud."

"So have I," said Hawk.

"Who knows but that these dynamitic, secretly conspiring miscreants may have imported the fiendish device to this country, for the purpose of terrifying, or even destroying, the victims of their vengeance or malice?"

"Who knows?" said Hawk.

"By Jove, my boy, but you take it coolly enough, you know!"

"Why shouldn't I?"

"But look! The cell has shrunk another inch since I first noticed the alteration!"

"You had better be quitting it."

"How, since I don't know the manner of my entering it?"

"True, no door is visible."

"Besides, I was to receive some sort of notice when my time is up."

"Pray Heaven you will get it soon!"

"Gad! I should hope so. See; the interior is still shrinking!"

"I perceive it."

Blithers had by this time apparently worked himself up to an agony of alarm and solicitude.

"But, heavens and earth!" he exclaimed; "come what may, I cannot leave you in this death-trap."

"You must."

"Impossible! Reconcile yourself—conciliate this Kotzka while there is yet time!"

"Never!"

"But see; the space still shrinks while we are talking! At least, crave terms of the monster."

"Never!"

"By Jove, my boy, you are the most cold-blooded, immovable—"

He was interrupted by a thundering blow on the cell, as if the iron shell had been struck with a sledge-hammer.

Simultaneously, the air was impregnated with the same stifling vapor-puff that had preceded Blithers's mysterious entrance.

An instant later, when Hawk had recovered from its effects, he was once more alone.

Blithers had vanished as mysteriously as he had appeared.

He had left a token of his visit, however, lying on the floor of the cell.

It was the long and stout cord, a new quarter-inch rope, by which his arms had been pinioned.

Hardly knowing to what use it might be put, Hawk stooped to pick it up.

As he straightened himself, his head struck against the ceiling!

So much had the girth of the cell already contracted, that the interior had assumed tunnel-like proportions, in which he could no longer stand quite erect.

And the iron sides were coming together just

as noiselessly, steadily and relentlessly as the iron roof was shutting down.

Forgetful for the moment of Clarisse's instructions, Hawk stood, or rather crouched, in the center of the cell, gazing back into the diminishing recess, overmastered by a supreme sense of horror.

His seeming indifference to his peril, in Blithers's presence, had merely been assumed.

Now that he was alone, the full knowledge of his situation well-nigh paralyzed his faculties.

He could see the iron box in which he was entrapped slowly and remorselessly closing in upon him, like the contracting maw of some gigantic reptile into which he had been sucked by the vortex of a nightmare.

Yet lower he crouched, quivering like a leaf, while he could almost touch the narrowing sides with his elbows.

Then there came another shivering blow from without.

It was followed by the same terrible voice that had thundered forth its demands when he had dangled over the pit of fire and steel.

"A chance for life is yet accorded you, Hawk Heron!" exclaimed the voice. "Swear to relinquish your pursuit of Count Kotzka, the Proscribed!"

"Never!"

"Reflect," continued the voice. "But two more blows will be struck with this hammer. At the last, the contracting process will be hastened—the roof and walls will close upon you like a house of cards—your iron tomb will become your iron shroud!"

Hawk vouchsafed no answer.

Even in this emergency, however, he could not help thinking, "How odd that this villain should echo Blithers's prediction, almost to the exact words!"

"Once more, and for the last time, speak!" again cried the voice. "Will you take the oath demanded of you?"

Hawk could now easily touch the sides of the cell with his elbows, and he was half-doubled up by the encroachment of the descending roof.

The ordeal through which his resolution was passing was appalling—his hair was bristling and the sweat of mental agony pouring from him in streams.

But he was indomitable.

"Never!" he gasped through his clinched teeth.

A diabolical laugh of mingled fury and derision rung out from overhead.

"Adamantine dolt! incorrigible enemy! die then in thy perversity!" again called out the voice, though in receding tones, as though its owner was retreating. "Three minutes hence thy body will be a breathless, broken and irretrievable mass within its iron shroud!"

Hawk shuddered as the voice died away.

Terrible as it had been, it had afforded him a species of companionship that was preferable to solitude in the presence of that awful, torturing death that was gathering him into its iron embrace.

He was now so narrowly inclosed as to be able to change his attitude only with the utmost difficulty.

The fact that the contracting process was now going on much more slowly—so slowly as to be hardly perceptible—was only a refinement of the torment endured by our hero.

His eyes were starting from their sockets, his breath coming and going in quick, panting gasps.

He could only wait, in a sort of horrible expectation, for the next of those two fateful hammer-strokes that had been promised.

At last it came!

It fell so heavily and jarringly that the shivering iron walls inclosing the miserable captive bruised his flesh through his garments.

Was not the end now at hand—was he not already, to all intents and purposes, enveloped in his iron shroud?

Still, the few remaining instants of immunity from the fell destroyer's actual embrace were as an age, and Hawk groaned aloud.

Suddenly Clarisse's penetrating whisper rung through the metal plates close to his ear.

"The embrasure—the window!" hissed the voice. "Have you forgotten, or are you mad?"

"I don't believe I can turn toward the window now," Hawk managed to gasp in reply. "I am fairly locked up in iron!"

A low, despairing wail floated in to him.

Then the whisper was yet more urgent and energetic.

"Try, only try, or you are lost!" it continued. "Father of Mercy! not a moment is to be lost. The next hammer stroke disjoints the entire cell and seals your fate!"

By a desperate effort, Hawk succeeded in turning right about face.

But the window?

He uttered a savage cry, like that of a snared wild beast whose last hope of escape has been suddenly and unexpectedly cut off.

The window was no longer there!

At least, only a narrow slit of the embrasure remained, the contracting walls of the cell having closed over the greater part from either side.

Nevertheless, Hawk frantically edged his way toward it.

He was too late—the catastrophe was upon him!

At that instant, the last hammer stroke fell with shattering force, and the iron walls and roof tumbled in upon and around him with a hollow crash!

CHAPTER XVII.

IN DARKNESS AND STORM.

BUT the sudden demolition of the iron walls imprisoning our hero had also re-opened the embrasure.

By a last desperate leap, Hawk gained the ledge, and ensconced himself within the opening just as the massive plates collapsed with a hideous crash on the floor behind him.

Breathless and half-unnerved, he clutched the grating of the window, and looked back.

The immense room in which the hideous dungeon had stood was wrapped in darkness.

Out of this darkness, there issued a retreating voice, the terrible voice of Kotzka, the Proscribed.

"Come away, and leave the stubborn fool to grovel in his iron shroud!" cried the voice. "He dared his awful fate, and it overtook him. Tomorrow we can dispose of the remains."

Then there was a sound of numerous footsteps dying away in the distance.

Outside the weather had changed, and a furious tempest was raging.

Hawk waited long and anxiously, in the hope of receiving some further intimation from Clarisse.

None came.

The space within was doubtless deserted, and yet back again into that chamber of horrors, Hawk dared not venture.

Should he do so, hidden foes might spring upon him as if by magic; and, as the case stood, he was doubtless thought to be dead, a mangled and motionless inmate of the iron shroud, which erroneous impression might greatly facilitate his escape.

He now produced from his sleeve his fine, delicate saw, and went to work on the thick bars of the grating.

His task was frequently illuminated by flashes of lightning through the pouring rain, while thunder-peals rolled and crashed overhead.

He was an expert at his work, and two bars were presently displaced.

He dragged his body half-through the opening and gazed anxiously below and above, as the lightning lent its illuminating flashes.

Scarcely ten feet over his head was the cornice of the building, just back of which, he was sure, arose the tower in which Olga was imprisoned.

Far, far below lay the dimly-lighted, deserted street.

The rope which he had secured, though new and strong, was barely thirty feet in length.

To ascend or descend directly was an impossibility.

But a flash suddenly revealed to Hawk the roof-ledge of an adjoining building, a little lower than his position, and about twenty feet to one side.

By suspending himself from the remains of the grating, there was a chance, the slightest chance that he might succeed in swinging himself along the blank face of the brewery, so as to obtain the coveted foothold.

Enormous as was the risk, it was taken almost as soon as conceived.

A few minutes later, he was suspended over the awful depths, with the rope knotted under his arms, and the storm whirling, lashing and whipping him about like a reed.

As he pushed himself from one side to the other, he felt the rope suddenly give with his weight an inch or two.

He looked up.

Horror!

A flash showed him that the rope, by rubbing against the sharp outer edge of the embrasure, was almost severed!

One more oscillation might plunge him, bleeding and mangled, upon the pavement below.

However, desperate as was the chance, he must take it.

By a last powerful effort, he swung himself on a level with the adjoining roof.

Just then the rope parted!

But he had already gained a grip of the ledge. The roof chanced to be a level one.

A moment more, and he was standing upon it, breathless, and with the severed rope dangling from his body.

As he rid himself of the incumbrance, he took his bearings.

He was on the flat roof of one of a series of lofty tenement-houses.

The blank side-wall of the brewery building rose above it to a height of twenty-odd feet, and above that, set a little back, rose the tower in which Olga was imprisoned.

Drenched and shaken as he was, Hawk looked up at it with longing eyes, as he crept over the roof in the pouring rain.

Suddenly a short figure, with a dark-lantern in one hand, a pistol in the other, sprang up in his path from behind a chimney.

"What!" thought Hawk; "have my enemies pursued me even here?"

Unarmed as he was, he instantly closed with the figure.

There was a shot, the bullet grazing the detective's hair, and then his assailant and he were locked in a hand-to-hand struggle.

Hawk found himself by far the larger and stronger.

In an instant he had whirled his antagonist from his foothold, and snatched the weapon from his hand.

Then came an illuminating lightning-flash.

Each recognized the other at the same instant, as they staggered apart.

"Nixey!"

"Boss Heron!"

It was, indeed, the faithful lad.

Hawk again caught him in his arms, but tenderly and gratefully, though in supreme astonishment.

"Now Heaven be praised, for I thought you dead!" he exclaimed.

"Not yet, boss!" was the lad's cheerful reply. "But, oh! Lordy, boss, how awful you look!"

"In what way?"

"As if you had been havin' pot-luck with ghosts!"

"I may well look that way, for they came near making one of me, and at first I took you for another. But why are you here?"

"To look after you, boss."

"How did you escape from the tunnel? And Seagrave—is he also alive?"

"Alive an' kickin', boss; same as me."

"Tell me about it."

"The bu'st-up in the tunnel brought down the roof, boss, but behind both Mr. Seagrave an' me, he at one end, an' me at the other. Then we got out at different ends, an' met ag'in on top of the rocks."

"Good! And what have you been doing since?"

"Fu'st off, Mr. Seagrave thought you must have been killed, but I was sure you hadn't been."

"Why?"

"I sort o' knowed it wasn't your luck to be cornered to death like a rat in a hole, boss."

Hawk once more embraced his stanch little friend.

"I now see why it was that I overheard the report of my friends' destruction," he thought. "It was intended that I should overhear it, in order to strike deeper despair into my soul. Well, go on," he continued, aloud.

"Well, boss, then Mr. Seagrave was fur notifyin' the perlice, but I wouldn't hear of it."

"That was right."

"Then I was fur seekin' out Mr. Blithers, but on second thoughts concluded I wouldn't."

"Right again!"

"Then, the rest of that night an' yesterday, when we wasn't asleep, Mr. Seagrave was skir-mishin' around tryin' to find Miss Clarisse, but without success, while I was busy in locatin' that old brewery, into which I sort o' felt you must have forced your way, an' been captured."

"Ah! and you located it at last?"

"Only two hours ago, boss. Then I made my way up to the roof of this 'ere tenement through the hallways. My object, boss, was to gain the roof of the brewery, an' somehow make my way down through it to your relief."

Hawk pressed his hand.

"I had been studyin' that 'ere dividin' wall, boss, fur more'n an hour, wonderin' how I'd shin up over it, when you suddenly crept over the roof an' tackled me. But, Jewhillikins! how it rains! We'll be washed away like gum-drops, boss!"

"Where is Seagrave now?" asked the detective, heedless of the rain.

"Down at the door, on watch."

"On watch?"

"Yes, boss. This hull block of tenements jest swarms with Eyetalian, Rooshan an' other furrin galoots what may be feller-conspirators of that Kotzka."

"Oho! Can you signal Seagrave to come up here?"

"Yes, boss; but, fu'st off, let me lead you to a place of shelter."

He led the way along the roofs till they were underneath a little room, or shed, built over one of the scuttles.

"All right now, boss," said Nixey. "But before I signal, will you permit me to propound a question?"

"Certainly; speak."

"Why stay up here, boss? Why not come down yourself, an' take a rest?"

Hawk pointed out of the shed at the tall outline of the tower on the brewery.

"Olga is imprisoned up there," said he. "I shall take no rest till I have seen and spoken with her."

This was said in a tone that admitted of no argument.

Nixey ran to the edge of the roof, and sounded a shrill cat-call down into the street.

A moment later, as Hawk and he advanced toward the nearest open scuttle, Seagrave came bounding up through it, notwithstanding that he was burdened with a box in which were a number of odd-looking, bulbous-shaped bottles, partitioned off one from another.

He had hardly recognized Hawk, with a cry of delighted astonishment, before he exclaimed: "Be on your guard! I am pursued! A house-full of foreign desperadoes are at my heels! They have recognized me—they are doubtless Kotzka's minions!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN MID-AIR.

"QUICK!" said Hawk; "have you a spare weapon? I am unarmed."

Setting down the box, Seagrave thrust a revolver into his grasp.

"What are those bottles?" asked Hawk.

"Hand-grenades, for putting out fires. I found them in a staircase-niche on my way up."

"Your purpose with them?"

"I hardly know; but being filled with some sort of suffocating chemicals, they may assist in our defense. Ha! here they come."

The inmates not only of that one house, but of the entire block, seemed to have taken the alarm.

As Seagrave spoke, one or more wild-looking heads popped up out of almost every scuttle, to be speedily followed by bodies of both men and women.

All were armed, mostly with knives, and, with wild, threatening cries in foreign dialects, they made toward the three friends through the driving rain, with the lightning lending its weird flashes to the exciting scene.

"Upon them!" cried one, in Spanish; "they are our master's foes!"

"Diavolo, yes!" cried another, in Italian; "cut them in pieces!"

"Two or three can play at that game!" growled Seagrave, while his companions fired their pistols over the assailants' heads; "take some Satanic snuff for a change!"

With that, one of the glass grenades from his hand struck and broke on the first ruffian's brow, filling the air momentarily with overpowering and suffocating fumes.

"*Por Dios! las fantasmas, las fantasmas!*" ("Heavens! the ghosts, the ghosts!") spluttered the sufferer, tumbling back, head over heels, into the scuttle from which he had just emerged.

Then both Hawk and Nixey lent a hand at the novel bombardment, which was continued with dire effects.

"Whenever you see a head hit it!" was their Donnybrookian motto for the time being.

The female assailants were spared, but their companions were treated without mercy.

Flask after flask broke in rapid succession on as many dusky foreheads.

The fumes of the released chemicals at length became almost intolerable, and the assailants grew correspondingly frightened and bewildered.

"These are fiends! these are sorcerers!" they clamored, in their various lingos. "Run, run! They will burn us alive!"

As they turned tail, and began to disappear, helter-skelter, down the different trap-doors, the victors could hardly refrain from laughter.

However, one thick-set ruffian lingered a little behind, as though still undaunted.

Hawk and Seagrave recognized him at the same instant.

They sprung upon him, dashed the knife from his hand, and had him at their mercy in a moment.

"Quick, Nixey!" cried Hawk; "a gag and some cords, if you can find such things."

"All right, boss!"

Nixey explored his capacious pockets, and produced a long cord and a ragged, but voluminous handkerchief.

These were speedily put to use, and the captive lay gagged and helpless in the driving rain.

"A hostage is a good thing to have now and then," said Hawk, examining the prisoner's face by the aid of Nixey's lantern. "Ha! I was not deceived."

It was a round and ruddy face, but sullen and determined-looking, with short-cropped mutton-chop whiskers.

"Neither was I deceived," said Seagrave. "It is the shorter ruffian who attacked me in Melton place, and cursed so loudly in Russian."

"It is also the mysterious coupe driver," said the detective. "Let us question him a bit."

But no amount of questioning proved of any avail.

Whether the fellow could understand what was said to him or not, he remained as dumb as a fish, merely regarding his inquisitors with a stony, disdainful stare.

"What is our next move?" asked Seagrave. "Those rascals will soon get the better of their superstitious terrors, and be upon us again."

"Yes," said Nixey, looking into the empty box, "an' there ain't no more stink-bottles left to pepper 'em with."

Hawk pointed to the tower on the lofty adjoining roof.

"Yonder's our next task," said he. "Olga is up there—it won't do to back out now, with final triumph almost within our clutch."

He then hastily related his remarkable experiences while in Kotzka's power.

"Now," said he, when he had finished, "how

to surmount that dividing wall is the next problem.

"I doubt if it can be done," said Seagrave.

"Here is the rope," said Hawk, "that has already served me well. If we only had a grapple!"

"But here, boss," said Nixey, holding up his lantern, "here is a hook."

The lantern, though of the 'dark' variety, had evidently seen service in some stable. Attached to its hand-ring was a strong, sharp iron hook, to facilitate its being hung up almost anywhere at hap-hazard.

"A windfall!" exclaimed Hawk.

Quickly detaching the hook, he made it fast to one end of the rope.

Then two or three casts over the dividing wall were sufficient to make the hook catch firmly on its edge.

"Up with you, Nixey!" said Hawk; "and when you get up, make the rope securer."

Nixey grasped the rope, and, notwithstanding that it was wet and slippery, went up, hand over hand, with the agility of a squirrel.

After securing the rope, he peeped down over the ledge.

"Who next, boss?" he cried.

Seagrave was sure he couldn't climb the rope, so Hawk Heron went up next.

"Make the prisoner fast," he called down, after he had reached the top.

"What?" cried Seagrave; "will you take this rascal up there?"

"Of course! What good is a hostage if you let him out of your grip?"

Without another word, Seagrave fastened the rope around the prisoner, and he was drawn up.

Then, performing a like service for himself, he presently stood beside his friends on the brewery roof.

He had hardly got there before there were indications of another raid upon the roofs they had just deserted.

"Down with you!" ordered Hawk, in a hoarse whisper. "Keep out of sight!"

They had no sooner crouched behind the ledge than the second invasion of the roofs below took place.

The foreigners came trooping up in swarms. They were better armed than before, and more enterprising. But as no enemy was any longer in sight, and they did not seem to think it possible that an escape could have been effected over the dividing wall, they evidently concluded that their prey had somehow slipped down into the street by one of the scuttles.

At all events, after running about in the rain and filling the air with their curses for a few minutes, they gave up their quest, and disappeared.

The storm, after a brief lull, was now more furious than ever.

The rain descended in torrents, the force of the wind was terrific, the thunder crashed overhead, and the electric flashes were almost continuous.

The tower was about thirty feet high. With the exception of a narrow, railed balcony, near the top, over which a clock-dial had formerly looked out from four sides, it was an uninterrupted column all the way up, as straight, smooth and bare as a factory chimney.

The entrance up into this tower was evidently altogether from inside and below.

The bare shaft of wood contained not a window, not a loophole, not a projecting ledge; in fact, nothing that would afford a catch for a grapple, or a foothold for the most enterprising climber.

But up above the balcony, from what had been the clock-chamber, there streamed a pale light.

"Olga is up there, in Kotzka's power!" said the detective, solemnly. "She must be rescued to-night! It is now or never!"

Nixey surveyed the tower hopelessly, while Seagrave moodily cast down his eyes.

At this juncture, they all became aware of a light, tapping sound on the roof, that was barely distinct from the pounding of the rain.

Nixey drew nearer to Hawk, and pointed to where the gagged and bound prisoner lay, a few yards away.

"Hist, boss!" he whispered. "That snoozer is signalin' to somebody down through the roof!"

"Hush!" said Hawk, in the same tone. "Let us watch without appearing to notice him."

He then called his companion's attention to the tower, and appeared to wholly busy himself with attempting to cast the improvised grapple so that it would catch on the little balcony so far above.

While thus ostensibly engaged, he noticed that the prisoner, while keeping up the tapping signals, had stealthily rolled himself down the sloping roof to a spot between the line of two chimneys.

Suddenly this spot opened inwardly, like a huge trap-door, a flood of light rushed out, and then the head and shoulders of a powerful, swarthy ruffian appeared through the opening, and grasped the captive, to drag him away.

Unexpected as was the movement, the three friends were sufficiently on the alert to baffle it.

While Seagrave and Nixey threw themselves

upon the hostage, Hawk leaped over his body, and dealt the new-comer a tremendous blow in the face with his revolver.

The very bones were heard to crack.

The ruffian dropped out of sight, without a groan, like a dead man, but the trap flew back with a spring, there was the click of a catch-bolt, and the aperture was as securely closed as before.

Hawk cocked his revolver, and pressed the muzzle between the prisoner's eyes.

"Look you!" he hissed between his clinched teeth. "Is there to be any more signaling—any more attempts to escape?"

The prisoner turned pale, as he shook his head vigorously.

"Good enough, then!" said the detective, dragging him far up the roof. "Take heed of your promise, less you be silenced much more effectually than at present!"

The storm had now reached a fury that would have terrified any one else from the task that was under way, but it only seemed to inspire our hero with renewed energy.

After several more attempts, he managed to cast the hook upon the railing so that it held firmly.

He grasped the rope, and was about to ascend, when Seagrave interposed, respectfully but firmly.

"Heron—Hawk! you must not go up to her," said he, in a voice hoarse with emotion. "That is my duty!"

Hawk was turning upon him angrily, when he suddenly recollected that Seagrave was in love with Olga.

"Don't be unreasonable, my friend," said he, in a low voice. "In the first place, you could not possibly climb this rope, while I can. Then again, it is not Olga, but Clarisse, that I am in love with."

Recognizing the force of his words, Seagrave bowed his head, and drew back.

Then, tossing about in the storm like a mariner in the main-top with but a rope-splice between him and the rolling waves, Hawk began the perilous ascent of the tower.

CHAPTER XIX.

THE TOWER.

As he slowly made his way up the rope, his comrades watched his progress with intense anxiety.

A fall would cost him his life, without a saving chance.

The roof below was so steep that, in that event, nothing could prevent his body bounding over the giddy edge.

At last, however, he succeeded in grasping the railing, he clambered over it, he was in the balcony, the dangerous goal was won!

The clock-dials had all been boarded over except the one facing our hero.

This also had been built up, but a narrow, grated window had been left in the center, through which the dim light was streaming.

A glance into the interior showed a comfortably furnished little sitting-room.

It was unoccupied.

But a small lamp was burning on a table. The light of this revealed the door of an inner apartment, doubtless a bedchamber.

It likewise revealed the head of a stairway, that wound down through the interior of the tower.

The former clock-room had been cunningly improvised into a strong-room.

This, then, was the tower prison of the beautiful Olga!

Standing outside in the beating storm, with the thunder crashing overhead, Hawk, now that he had attained his prayed-for object, gazed into the empty room with mingled timidity and disappointment.

Olga was doubtless in the inner room, her wrongs and troubles buried for the time being in the holy oblivion of slumber.

Should he dare disturb that sacred sleep, even in the interest of her deliverance?

And yet might not her jailer appear at any instant, to thwart this plan for her rescue?

While he was debating with himself, the dividing door opened, and Olga herself appeared on the threshold.

Hawk's heart bounded.

She was fully dressed. Her face was very pale, her eyes were swollen and haggard, with a terrified, hunted look in their depths, and yet her youthful beauty seemed to have been only intensified by the persecution she had endured.

Suddenly she perceived Hawk's face at the grating.

She made an alarmed, shrinking motion. Then, doubtless reflecting that danger was not to be apprehended from that quarter, she rushed to the window, and threw up the sash.

She recognized him.

"Ah, my friend, my deliverer!" she exclaimed, seizing his hand with impulsive eagerness. "Do I dream? Can I believe my eyes?"

"It is no dream, Olga," said Hawk. "I am here to rescue you!"

"But cannot you come in here out of that terrible storm? How did you reach this dizzy height? Oh, I am so happy! Did any one accompany you? How will you rescue me?"

She was greatly excited, putting one question after the other with nervous haste.

"My first move shall be to get rid of these bars as quickly as possible," said Hawk, answering the last query first, as he set to work on the grating with his fine saw. "Then, if I don't go in there to you, it will be because you will come out here to me. Yes; some one did accompany me. He is a worthy, handsome young fellow, very much in love with you, who is waiting on the roof below."

Olga colored, and then looked greatly troubled.

"I do not understand," she faltered, as the work on the grating proceeded. "I have no lover."

"Can't you recall the name of Seagrave?" said Hawk.

"Seagrave? No. But wait. Was not that the name of the young man who so persistently attended all my performances at the *Thalia*, always occupying the same seat?"

"Like enough."

"A medical young man, tall, dark, with wavy hair and soft eyes?"

"Yes."

"I remember now. He told me his name—Seagrave, that was it!"

"He has no other."

"Ah! I once permitted him to escort me home, when Mr. Schmidt had failed me, and my mother was too ill— But, ah heaven! I must not think of her, or I shall go mad. Yes; the young man accompanied me to my door. But he was so silent, so gentle, so respectful, I never dreamed—"

She paused, coloring again, this time deeply.

"Of course not!" said Hawk, sawing away energetically. "Girls never do, even when a young fellow is dying with love for 'em."

"Don't say that," murmured Olga.

"But I must, for, if it hadn't been for Seagrave, you would doubtless have been buried alive."

"What is that you say?"

Seeing that she was growing interested, to the obvious improvement of her spirits, Hawk gave her a highly wrought account of Seagrave's instrumentality in her rescue from the undertaker's hands.

"Ah! how can I ever sufficiently thank the young man?" Olga murmured, when he had finished.

"Easily enough, if your heart is engaged to no other," said Hawk, with a muttered anathema upon his work, which was progressing but slowly.

"I love no one—I have never loved," sighed Olga. "Besides, I cannot but remember that you, sir, were my actual preserver from that horrid fate, though I do not even know your name."

"Hawk Heron, a poor detective, at your service, young lady."

"Hawk Heron? What an odd name! And yet so significant!"

"Don't forget, though, that but for Seagrave, the man who loves you to adoration, I could never have preserved you."

"I shall not forget. Ha!"

She started back as there came a sudden gust of the storm, accompanied by a blinding flash and a tremendous thunder-clap, that might have torn Hawk from his foothold had he not clung to the grating.

"Don't worry about the storm, please," said Hawk, resuming his task, "but pray answer such questions as I shall put."

"With all my heart, sir."

"How did you disappear from the room in which I laid you after taking you out of the coffin?"

"I hardly know myself. You had hardly been gone five minutes, I could still hear you moving about in the adjoining room, when a noise at the window near where I lay caused me to turn my head. Ah!"

She covered her eyes, as though to shut out an awful recollection.

"Pray, go on!" exclaimed Hawk.

"A man—an immensely powerful man—had just stepped through the window as stealthily as a panther."

"Had you seen him before? Did you recognize him?"

"Yes, yes!"

"Was it Kotzka—the same man who had haunted you at the theater, who had subsequently abducted you, who afterward brought you here?"

"Ah, Heaven, the same!"

"Go on!"

"Before I could make an outcry, I was in his terrible grasp, with a saturated handkerchief pressed over my mouth and nostrils."

"And then?"

"My senses deserted me—I knew no more till I found myself alone in this prison."

"You have been here ever since?"

"Yes."

"No visitors?"

"Oh, yes! Twice a day a man brings me food. Then once I have been visited by a lady—oh, such a sweet, such a lovely creature!"

"Her name?"

"She told me to call her 'Clarisse.'"

"Ah! the object of her visit?"

"To condole with me, like a sister, in my misfortunes."

"Anything else?"

"Yes; to warn me that, though my captivity is necessary for the welfare of some secret cause that she would only mysteriously hint of, I should turn a deaf ear to all of Kotzka's threats and importunities."

"Threats? importunities? Heavens! does the monster dare—"

"Alas! he is my only other visitor—he gives me his hateful presence twice a day."

"For what purpose?"

"To beseech me to end my misfortunes by marrying him."

"Marry him? Oh, heavens!"

"That is, he begins with entreaties, and ends with the most mysterious and horrible threats upon finding me obdurate."

"Why, this is the quintessence of fiendishness! Is the monster mad? Marry him, the destroyer of your peace, your own mother's mur—"

"Ah! don't speak it—don't recall the awful scene! Besides, how can I know 'twas he?"

A wild terror seemed suddenly to have possessed her.

With two of the iron bars nearly severed, Hawk paused in his work, and looked at her with amazement.

"Child, your words are an enigma!" he exclaimed.

"Ah, speak not again of that scene!"

"But I must speak of it! When I have effected your release, it will be necessary for you to testify as to that terrible tragedy."

"Ah! but if I cannot?"

"You amaze me! Cannot testify to what you actually witnessed?"

"She implored me not to."

"Who did?"

"My mother."

Hawk could only make a gesture of continued astonishment.

"I give it up!" he muttered, ripping out one of the bars. "Olga, you are inexplicable!"

He then resumed his work, and, seeing that she was greatly distressed, changed the subject.

"Let me continue my questions," said he.

"Yes, sir," was the submissive reply.

"Have you any recollection of your infancy in a foreign land?"

"Only of my mother, distinctly. All the rest is shadowy—unreal. I was not four years old when I quitted it."

"Can you recall your father?"

"But vaguely—as in a dream. My mother told me he died a martyr to liberty. Kotzka, since I have been here, has told me the same, adding that my father bequeathed me to his charge."

"He lies!"

"I rejoice to know it!"

"Any recollection of Kotzka himself in those early days?"

"But a dim one—even less distinct than of my father. And yet!" she put her hand to her forehead, with a strained, troubled expression; "and yet, I seem to recall him at times more distinctly—the form and face of one whom my father liked and my mother feared—together with another, a much younger man, a mere youth."

"Ah! that other? Try to restore him in your memory—only try!"

She tapped her forehead once more, and knitted her brows, but ended by shaking her head.

"I cannot! I but recall dreamily a youthful face and figure that was somehow mysteriously associated with Kotzka—nothing more."

Hawk pressed his face through the opening he had effected, and regarded her eagerly.

"Scrutinize my lineaments well," said he. "Do they not assist your memory, Olga? Have you no place for them amid those indistinct vistas of the past?"

She regarded him long and earnestly. At last, as a change was creeping into her face, a change that might mean the desired revival of memorial intelligence, there came such a tremendous paroxysm of the tempest, followed by a deafening crash of thunder, that she started back with a scream.

"Ah, you will be blown away!" she exclaimed. "This is awful—I can feel the tower rock!"

"Fear nothing," said Hawk, almost through with the second bar. "Do you recall no others once familiar—no brother, no sister?"

"None, though my poor mother was mysteriously reticent on that point. Ah! thank Heaven your work is nearly complete!"

"Yes; but a few moments more, and I will be in there with you."

"And then?"

"Then you must prepare to go with me."

"By the way you came here?"

"Yes; there is no other. You will not be sorry to escape out of Kotzka's vulture clutch?"

"Sorry? Oh, Heaven! with what eagerness I shall fly with you!"

Here the second bar yielded to Hawk's wrenching grasp.

"But not with more eagerness," he cried, springing into the room, "than I shall bear you away, out of that arch-fiend's power forever!"

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared a familiar and demoniac voice. "What! are you so sure of baffling the vulture's clutch, my falcon foe?"

Then Kotzka himself leaped into view, rising over the staircase landing with a terrible aspect, a cocked revolver in each hand.

Olga shrieked, while, covered as he was with the pistols, Hawk could only start back in momentary confusion.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the villain again. "What! would my pretty dove abandon her faithful vulture for a younger and a falcon wooer? But two can play at the game of treachery, and—"

He was interrupted by a fresh paroxysm of the storm, then the structure quivered to its foundations, there was a dazzling flash, a terrific peal, and the tower was in flames.

It had been struck by lightning!

Kotzka was the first to recover from the stunning effects, and dropping his pistols, he hurled himself upon the detective, while the latter was still dazed and half-paralyzed.

"Ha, ha, ha! A clever second-thought!" roared the giant. "Marplot, whom nothing will seem to kill! let us try the hangman's noose! Thou shalt dance on air before thy time!"

With that, he drew up the rope by which Hawk had ascended, and knotted the end securely about his neck.

Olga shrieked and seized his arm.

He thrust her back with an oath, and raised the detective's helpless form high over his head.

The next instant he had cast it far out over the balcony of the blazing tower.

CHAPTER XX.

"HAMMERS AND TONGS!"

FOR the moment, it looked as if it was all up with the career of Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective, beyond all mortal hope.

His friends on the roof below had only recovered from the effects of the thunderbolt, to look up and behold the entire upper part of the tower in flames.

Then their horror and consternation had been completed by beholding their beloved chief hurled over the balcony railing with the rope tightened into a hangman's knot about his neck.

But the flames, that illuminated this awful spectacle, proved the salvation of our hero.

They had spread along the balcony, burning away the fastening of the rope, by which he would otherwise have been strangled with even more than the conventional jerk.

Thus he fell into the arms of Nixey and Seagrave, who succeeded in preventing him from rolling down the roof, and the dashing rain soon revived him, in spite of the tremendous shaking-up he had undergone.

"An ax or a hatchet—quick!" gasped the indomitable detective, tearing the hempen noose from his neck. "Olga will be burned to death, if we do not chop our way through the tower! Hark! hear you not Kotzka using an ax up yonder? Search our hostage for some sort of implement to our purpose!"

Seagrave and Nixey had already pounced upon the bound captive, when, as if in answer to his prayer, an ax, probably escaping from Kotzka's grasp, came flying out of the tower-top, and fell at Hawk's feet.

To appropriate it as a godsend, and attack the base of the tower like a madman, was the work of an instant.

The great chips flew from the wooden framework in showers at every blow.

"Wait, Hawk!" said Seagrave, coming up to him. "The rain is rapidly putting out the flames."

"So much the better!" said Hawk, without pausing in his labor; "but we can cut our way through to the staircase before Kotzka can make his way down it with his prisoner!"

"Boss," said Nixey, also coming up, "it can't be did!"

"Nothing like trying, anyway," gasped the detective between his strokes. "What did you find on our prisoner?"

"Only these," said Seagrave, holding up an open tin box, packed with round, oblong tubes of a dirty brown color. "I can't imagine what they are."

Hawk made a long enough pause to examine them hastily.

"I can," said he, resuming his work. "They're dynamite cartridges."

"What!" exclaimed Seagrave, nearly dropping the box. "There must be danger in even handling them!"

A shot from above at this juncture perforated the brim of his hat.

They all looked up.

Kotzka, pistol in hand, and getting ready for another shot, was leaning over the half-burned balcony railing, with a face like a fiend.

The flames of the still burning tower-roof were sending their red tongues high up in the air, far above his head.

"Blast your infernal picture!" yelled Nixey, in a sudden fury of boyish rage; "dye think you can have all the murder an' arson on your side forever?"

Then, hardly knowing what he was about, and before he could be prevented, he seized one of

the explosives, and hurled it up at Kotzka's head.

The cartridge missed its mark, but flew far up into the topmost flames, where it exploded with a deafening noise and a tremendous jar.

Kotzka was seen to be crushed down onto the balcony in a squatting posture.

It was even all the three friends could do to keep their feet, the entire building trembling to its foundations.

"Hurrah!" cried Hawk, redoubling his blows with the ax; "we'll yet cut them off at the staircase!"

Elated by his dangerous experiment, Nixey sprang to his aid, tearing away large chips and splinters as fast as loosened.

The framework was of pine, old, and in many places rotten.

In a few minutes more a breach was effected almost large enough for a man to crawl through.

The staircase was in sight.

Suddenly Olga appeared upon it, her golden hair streaming over her shoulders, her hands outstretched wildly toward them.

"Save me!" she shrieked.

At that instant, however, an unlooked-for apparition interposed between the maiden and her would-be rescuers.

It was that of the hostage, who had mysteriously freed himself of his bonds.

Dashing them aside, with an appalling yell, he snatched a handful of cartridges from the box in Seagrave's hands, and plunged headforemost through the breach.

They saw him grasp Olga roughly, and drag her below, just as Kotzka, white and dazed-looking, was making his way down behind.

Seagrave fairly gnashed his teeth.

"Villain!" he cried, leveling his revolver; "you at least shall only follow her as a corpse!"

Point-blank at the ruffian's breast he fired, but apparently without a particle of effect.

"Ha, ha, ha!" laughed the giant, as he disappeared; "foiled again, fools, idiots that you are!"

Then the cartridges that had been snatched from the box were hurled far up through the hollow space toward the expiring flames at the top of the tower.

"Back, back for your lives!" shouted Hawk, dragging his companions along the roof.

"Down on your faces, flat down, I tell you!" They had barely obeyed, throwing themselves flat on their faces behind a short, thick chimney not far away, when the second explosion occurred.

It was twenty times more deafening, jarring and disastrous than the first.

There was a rumbling roar, a blaze, a stupendous concussion.

Then the entire tower was seen to spring up bodily into the air, and crumble back in ruins.

Then, as though in sympathy with the commotion below, the tumult of the elements redoubled overhead.

The lightning flashed, the thunder crashed, and the rain descended more torrent-like than ever.

"Come, my friends!" said Hawk, fastening the rope, which he had still retained, to the chimney, and throwing the free end over the dividing wall; "we must beat a temporary retreat at last."

"Whither away now?" said Seagrave.

"To *terra firma*."

"What then?"

"If Kotzka is driven out of the brewery building, we may head him off with his captive in the street."

Seagrave ground his teeth.

"The villain doubtless wears a bullet-proof shirt next his skin," he muttered. "If I get another go at him, it will be with a knife!"

"His nob shall be my next mark!" said Nixey. "I'm bettin' I'll ring the bell on it at my next shy!"

Then, one after the other, they followed Hawk, who had already preceded them, down the rope to the adjoining roofs.

So violent was the rainfall that even the terrible explosions so near at hand had called up but few of the tenement-dwellers as yet.

Dashing through such as had ventured on the roofs, the three friends plunged into one of the furthestmost scuttles that had been left open.

With but little interruption on the way, they succeeded in speedily reaching the street.

Here a bustling and tumultuous scene presented itself.

Though, thanks to the rain, the roof of the brewery had not caught fire, it was smoking, and the startling nature of the explosions had called forth the fire department in force.

The narrow street was, moreover, jammed with sightseers.

Nevertheless, a *coupe* had just driven up before a small door in the brewery building.

The three friends, from their momentary pause on the tenement stoop, could mark this much over the heads of the surging crowds.

Hawk and Nixey, at least, recognized both equipage and driver on the instant.

It was a mud-spattered black-and-yellow vehicle, drawn by a powerful dapple-gray horse, and its driver was a heavy-set short man, with mutton-chop whiskers, wearing no livery.

"The same turnout in which Olga was first abducted!" exclaimed Hawk, dashing toward it through the crowd.

"The same as brought the big man to the Brunswick!" cried Nixey, darting off in his wake.

"My assailant in Melton place—our hostage of a few moments ago!" muttered Seagrave, following.

They had nearly succeeded in forcing their way to the equipage, when Kotzka's towering form issued from the brewery door.

He was enveloped in a voluminous cloak, and he carried in his arms a slender, graceful figure, a glimpse of whose unconscious face was sufficient to identify it as Olga's.

"Stop that man!" yelled Hawk, fighting his way forward like a madman. "He is an abductor—an assassin—a fugitive from justice!"

The crowd gazed at him stupidly, while making way for him.

But before this was done Kotzka had sprung into the vehicle with his burden, slamming the door behind him, and the driver had lashed the big horse into movement.

But by this time Hawk was hanging at the animal's head, Nixey was clinging behind the box like a monkey in a hippodrome, and Seagrave, with one foot on the carriage-step, was glued against the door, dashing his armed hand through the glass panel.

Brought to a sudden halt, the equipage was instantly the center of a surging, exasperated crowd, most of whom seemed to imagine our hero and his followers as desperate highwaymen.

"Kill 'em!" "Arrest 'em!" "Save the big gent an' the gal!" "Where's the police?" "Club the robbers!"

These and similar expressions were vociferated from every side, and a general rush was made upon the center of the disturbance.

Taking advantage of the tumult, the driver suddenly dropped the lines, jumped from the box, and disappeared.

Another rush overturned the vehicle, and brought the horse to a stand-still, snorting and trembling.

The threatening cries continued.

"Shut up your noise!" shouted a big policeman, shouldering his way through the crowd, followed by several firemen. "There ain't no robbers here. Yonder chap is Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective."

Hawk and his comrades were now grouped about the overturned *coupe*.

"Nevertheless, Mr. Officer," said he, "there is crime on foot. My friends and I have fortunately stopped the flight of a villain in the act of carrying off a young lady."

"Where is he?" asked the officer.

"Here, inside the *coupe*!"

The policeman wrenched open the carriage door, and then, after peering in, burst into a laugh.

The *coupe* was empty!

CHAPTER XXI.

A COUNCIL OF WAR.

"COME, come, Mr. Hawk!" said the policeman chaffingly; "you're out for once, at least, in your clews."

But many of the bystanders, who had seen Kotzka enter the *coupe* with Olga in his arms, were quite as much nonplused over his mysterious disappearance as were Hawk and his friends.

They did not hesitate to support the latter in what they had to offer, which, was guardedly brief, as to the extraordinary circumstance.

The policeman grew thoughtful.

"At all events," said he at last, when the vehicle had been righted "I'll take charge of the turnout, an' see what the captain has to say about it."

He clambered on the box and drove away.

It having been decided that there was no fire about the brewery building, the firemen were likewise getting ready to quit the scene, and the idle throngs began to disperse.

Hawk signaled his followers and mingled with the crowd.

As he was about to emerge upon the neighboring avenue, he felt a paper slipped into his hand.

Turning swiftly, he was only in time to catch a glimpse of a muffled and graceful female figure ere it vanished in the crowd.

Five minutes later, when he and his friends were speeding down-town in an Elevated train, he examined the paper.

It bore the following words, hastily penciled:

"I had given you up for lost, but thank Heaven you are safe! But now I have horrible fears for Olga. To-morrow at the house in Melton place, an hour before dusk. Don't fail! CLARISSE."

He communicated the contents of this note to his friends.

It was now two o'clock in the morning.

"Where are we going now?" asked Seagrave, who was greatly dispirited.

"Down-town, to an odd nook I know of, where we can confer without interruption," said Hawk. "Before we seek the sleep and rest of

which we are in such great need, I deem it best we should perfect our plans for the morrow. Don't you agree with me?"

Both Seagrave and Nixey acquiesced, though appearing half-dead from fatigue and want of sleep.

Hawk alone, notwithstanding all he had undergone, seemed of iron.

"I am coming to think," said he, "that to-morrow we had better separate on several quests, all tending to the same end, to meet again afterward at some stated time and place."

"But why go so far down-town for our conference?" asked Seagrave.

Hawk bit his lip and remained thoughtful for a moment.

"I must confess, though with a sense of shame," he said, at last, "that, after all that has passed, I have come to suspect myself as being shadowed by that ubiquitous fiend Kotzka, or by one or another of his instruments, at almost every turn."

"He's a terror, boss!" said Nixey. "The last time I was in bed I dreamt he had me on a pitchfork over a potful of b'ilin' grease, an' I woke up with my hair standin' on end like tooth-picks."

"The villain wears concealed armor; of that I am satisfied," said Seagrave. "He seems capable of anything, like a sorcerer of old!"

They were thus agreed that their new precaution was being wisely taken.

"By the way, boss," said Nixey, presently, "I've a confession to make that I've been hindered from makin' up to this minute."

"What is it?"

"You remember when I shadowed Mr. Blithers, accordin' to your orders, after he left you an' me in your sleepin'-room, when I had got chucked down the Brunswick elevator-shaft?"

"Yes."

"You remember the report I brought you of his movements, boss?"

"Certainly."

"Well, I did somethin' more than shadow him, boss."

"What else did you do?"

"I picked his pocket, boss."

Hawk turned upon the lad in astonishment and indignation.

"Hold on, boss, before you fly off the handle," continued Nixey. "You know how I've never taken much stock in that Britisher? Well, I only picked his overcoat pocket of a letter, what reads sort of queer, an' I've kept for you ever since."

He handed Hawk an envelope, with letter inclosed, as he spoke.

"I've also something to add in the documentary line," said Seagrave. "Here are some things I snatched out of the *coupe* the second time I dashed my fist through the glass. Like enough Kotzka lost them out of one of his pockets before effecting his last disappearance with his captive."

He handed Hawk a crumpled envelope and a torn piece of writing.

The detective would have examined all these papers on the spot, but just then they reached the terminus of the Elevated road at the Battery.

"Come along!" said Hawk, buttoning his overcoat over the papers; "we can presently consider these matters at our leisure."

On descending from the railway station, they found that the rain had been superseded by a furious windstorm.

The air had, moreover, turned freezing cold, and everything exposed to it was covered with a glare of ice.

Hawk led the way across the lonely Battery Park, and through several narrow, dismal and deserted streets.

At last two colored lamps, flanking the descent into an obscure, mean-looking saloon, with tall, partly-lighted buildings on either side, were descried toward the end of a particularly narrow, steep and gloomy street they were traversing.

"Is yonder our destination?" asked Seagrave.

"I'm fly to the crib," interposed Nixey. "It's the 'Pig an' Whistle'—a roundyvoov for smugglers, wharf-rats an' river thieves."

"It is sort of crooked," assented Hawk, a little apologetically, "but it is our destination for all that, and we'll be safe from interruption there. The deuce!"

He narrowly missed a fall on the narrow, slippery walk at the concluding interjection, and his friends were momentarily disturbed in assisting his equilibrium.

At this juncture, a short, muffled man brushed noiselessly past them, after giving them a piercing look of scrutiny, and disappeared in the direction they were going.

"By Jove! that fellow's figure seemed familiar," exclaimed Hawk.

"He had mutton-chop whiskers, sure pop!" said Nixey.

"Our hostage—Kotzka's minion—the driver of the *coupe*!" said Seagrave. "I'm sure of it!"

They all felt uneasy over this supposition, but there was now no help for it, the man having vanished.

It was as though Kotzka's baleful influence

haunted them everywhere, and was in the very air they breathed.

As they approached the Pig and Whistle the fury of the wind increased.

There was a general banging of shutters and sign-boards, and it seemed a wonder that the roofs and chimneys should withstand the fierce gusts.

"What are these tall buildings on either side?" asked Seagrave, as they were about entering the saloon.

"The one on the left there," said Hawk, is occupied by telegraph, telephone and other offices. This other one, with the steam occasionally issuing from the basement, is the great Steam Heating Company's head-quarters."

"What the people is so mad against," supplemented Nixey, "from the way their pipes bust now an' then, makin' rock an' mud volcaners of the middle of the streets."

The saloon they now entered was a miserable, grimy dive, thronged with suspicious-looking characters, who eyed the new-comers with scowling and forbidding glances.

But a significant look from our hero was more than sufficient to conciliate the proprietor.

In a few minutes the three friends were installed in a snug little private room under the sidewalk, with a substantial lunch and smoking cups of coffee before them.

After disposing of the refreshments, Hawk first examined the letter which Nixey had surreptitiously obtained from Mr. Blithers.

On the envelope was the latter's New York address, written in a round official hand. There was no post-mark, so that it had doubtless been delivered by a public messenger or private hands.

The inclosure contained but a few lines, without date or personal signature.

It was to the following effect:

"If you can really give such information to His Excellency as shall lead to the arrest or destruction of the miscreants as an organization, the reward, as well as your own unconditional pardon, shall be secured to you. But His Excellency must first have absolute proofs of your good faith. SECRETARY."

The crumpled envelope, which Seagrave had snatched out of the *coupe*, was also without post-mark, and bore the address, "Adolphe Delancourt, 32 Melton place, New York."

"Here's a coincidence," said Hawk, when these things had been duly considered by the trio. "In the first place, both these addresses and the letter are in the same handwriting."

His companions assented, and looked at him expectantly.

"In the next place," he continued, hesitatingly, "Adolphe Delancourt is doubtless one of Kotzka's aliases. In fact, I remember hearing a woman"—he could not bring himself to mention Clarisse's name in such criminal connection—"address him as her 'sweet Adolphe.'"

"What do you deduce from all this?" asked Seagrave, at length.

"Thus far, that both Blithers and Kotzka are, or have been, in communication with some official department, perhaps with some foreign bureau."

"With the same end in view?"

"Impossible! Blithers is also interested in running Kotzka to earth, by reason of the foreign forgeries."

"I'm sorry you think so, boss," said Nixey, wagging his head. "I don't take no stock in that big Britisher."

"Never mind, my lad. My supposition being granted, what more likely than for Blithers to communicate with a foreign bureau—say the Russian Consulate—inasmuch as Kotzka is a Nihilist conspirator, as we have seen?"

"But wherefore?" asked Seagrave.

"Why, for assistance in securing his man, and obtaining at the same time the reward which the Russian Government may have offered for the disruption of the anarchist organization of which Kotzka is the undoubted head in this country."

"True," said Seagrave; "but why should 'Secretary' speak of granting him, Blithers, an unconditional pardon, besides the reward?"

"I confess that staggers me considerably," said Hawk, knitting his brows; "though Blithers may have actually joined the conspirators, for the express purpose of betraying them, thus rendering a subsequent pardon desirable."

"What? From the Czar's Government, for instance, and for a British subject on American soil? Preposterous!"

Hawk made an impatient gesture.

"I confess it is a mystery, though I still believe in Blithers, with certain reservations," said he. "But come, let us consider our remaining document."

He spread it out before him.

It was the left-hand half of a piece of writing that had been irregularly torn down nearly through the middle. The writing proved to be in the Russian language, and was submitted to Seagrave for translation, as being the only one familiar with that dialect.

While Seagrave was writing out the translation on a fragment of paper made to resemble the original, he said:

"This seems to have belonged to a rough draft of something afterward copied, or intended to be copied."

This was the translation:

"NEW Y
"TO HIS EXCELLENCY
"COUNT RU
"RUSSIA
"HONORED
"I am fully

information con-
tion of Revolution
City, but I must f
the promised rew
the Czar's uncon
and subseque
the vengeance

"I am so high
the conspirators
tion can be implici
proceeding from its

"Answer with
cautions as hereto

This was the mysterious fragment which the friends pored over for some moments in silence, and with but little satisfaction.

"In the first place," said Hawk, at last, "we will take for granted that the handwriting is that of Kotzka."

"What then?" asked Seagrave.

"Just this: That, if we only had the other half of this fragment, and the entire reading would prove the contemplated treachery of Kotzka to his revolutionary associates, as this fragment suggests, our task of bringing him to justice would be virtually accomplished."

"How?"

"Can you ask? The vengeance of the conspirators would be awful. The only difficulty would be to prevent them tearing him limb from limb, rather than delivering him bound and helpless into our hands."

"True for you, boss!" chirped Nixey.

"Ah!" said Seagrave; "but the other half of the writing we have not got."

"But we must get it!" exclaimed Hawk; "and you shall search for it, Seagrave."

"I?"

"Yes. Listen now to our programme until next we meet. You, Seagrave, shall try to track the missing fragment of manuscript. You had better first look for it in the *coupe* which the policeman took possession of. I will give you a few lines that will serve as your passport with the police. You, Nixey, shall once more shadow Mr. Blithers. I shall keep my appointment with Clarisse. Let us meet again in this place when the next midnight arrives. Now we will separate."

He returned the papers to his pocket and arose. As the trio were ascending out of the Pig and Whistle, the furious wind almost lifted them from their feet.

"It's a reg'lar snorter!" exclaimed Nixey, dancing about on the sidewalk to keep warm while a few parting words were being said. "We'd better all be in our beds than out—"

He was interrupted by a tremendous clatter overhead.

They had barely time to spring into the middle of the street before an immense sign-board came crashing down from the top of the adjoining building.

It struck on the very spot just deserted by the trio, and was shivered into a hundred pieces.

"Heavens, what a narrow escape!" exclaimed Seagrave.

"The chunky chap with the mutton-chop whiskers!" cried Nixey, with a sudden inspiration. "He had a hand in that—I'm bettin' on it!"

They were standing in front of the Steam Heating Company's establishment.

Hawk glanced up the front of the other tall building, from which the sign-board had fallen.

"It does look suspicious!" he muttered. "And that rascal, if he was the deed, might long before this have telephoned or telegraphed to his principal in villainy as to our whereabouts."

The words had hardly escaped his lips when there was a terrible subterranean explosion.

Then the street-bed, almost under their very feet, sprang into the air.

They had just time to seek the shelter on the opposite side, as the mass of stone, earth and ice, which had been thrown aloft higher than the adjacent roofs, fell back in a crashing shower.

A hissing sound accompanied the eruption, and for a few moments the air was obscured by dense clouds of escaping steam.

Then the Pig and Whistle disgorged a motley crowd of sight-seers, while several workmen rushed excitedly out of the Steam Heating Company's cellar.

"Thieves! treachery!" shouted one of the latter. "Did any of you notice a man run up out of the cellar just now?"

"What kind of a man?" asked Hawk.

"An awfully big man, in a long dark cloak. He was nosing around the engines a while ago, pretending to examine the machinery."

"What of that?"

"Then he disappeared. But he must have skulked in under the street, and tampered with the pipes. Didn't any of you see him come running out?"

"No," said Hawk. "Neither my friends nor I noticed any such person you describe."

He exchanged a significant look with Seagrave and Nixey, and the trio forthwith separated.

CHAPTER XXII.

A FRESH HORROR.

AN hour before dusk on the following evening, Hawk Heron was on his way to keep his appointment with Clarisse Letours in Melton place.

He was invigorated after a long restful slumber, followed by a hearty meal, and felt himself equal to any fresh adventure.

He had, moreover, just had an interview with his chief of the Detective Bureau, in which he had reported progress.

By way of disguise, he was attired in a brand-new fireman's uniform, and wore a false set of close-clipped, crispy beard all around his face, both of which became him well, while sufficiently concealing his identity.

Turning briskly into Melton place, he came suddenly upon old Mr. Schmidt, the music-teacher, whom he had not met since the Gotham Flats fire.

"Ah, mynheer! well met," cried Hawk, slapping the old man on the shoulder.

Mr. Schmidt had recognized the voice in spite of the fireman's dress.

"Ah, Mr. Heron! but I am glad to meet you again," said he, quite cheerfully. "I have been pining to learn the particulars of that horrible fire that ruined me."

"Gad!" said Hawk, bursting into a laugh; "I must say you look decidedly contented for a ruined man, my friend."

"I was insured, Mr. Heron," said the good old gentleman, managing to pump out a sigh. "I don't mind telling you that I was even liberally insured."

"Aha!"

"Yes, Mr. Heron," and here the sigh was unforced, "but that has not restored to me my pets, my beautiful birds, that were destroyed. I don't care so much for my musical instruments, most of which were old and worn out. But my birds, my lovely pets!"

"The scene of the murder—the Ashcombe flat—was entirely wiped out, I have heard?"

"Yes; not a trace of it left."

Hawk then related the particulars of the fire, and asked Mr. Schmidt where he was living.

"Close at hand," was the reply. "I have a nice third floor in a private house, my friend."

"But where?"

"Here in Melton place, No. 34."

Hawk started. This was the number adjoining Clarisse's residence.

"I hope you have a nice landlady," said he, with assumed indifference.

"Yes, my friend; a worthy but homely old soul, who has seldom anything to say, and who always has the face-ache."

"Ah! and you therefore see little of her features?"

"Never anything, my friend, but the upper part, and that is so homely as to leave no desire for a fuller view. Ah! how different from the beautiful widow Ashcombe, who was wont to take an interest in my comfort, and—"

"Stow that for the present. Any other lodgers besides yourself?"

"None other, my friend."

"How did you happen to hit upon such an out-of-the-way place?"

"Ah, it was very odd, my friend. On the morning after the fire, I was stupidly gazing at the fire, when a nice man, my present landlady's husband—"

"So, she has a husband?"

"Yes, my friend, though he is seldom at home, and I have never seen them in each other's company."

"I understand. He divined your difficulty, I suppose, offering you lodgings in his house, and you jumped at his offer."

"No, my friend, I never jump at anything. I am too old for that. But he seemed so pressing, so very pressing, that I should examine the rooms, that I consented, and presently hired them."

"Very pressing, eh? What is his name?"

"Mr. Arnold Dupont. He is a foreigner, speaking all the continental languages, which will be agreeable for me."

"What is he like?"

"A short, thick-built man, my friend, with a turn-up nose, determined lips, and those English-looking whiskers at the sides of the cheeks which you Americans call side-boards or mutton-chops."

Hawk started again. Indeed, it was all he could do to keep from betraying his astonishment.

"Well, good-afternoon, mynheer," said he, recovering himself. "I may call on you at your new quarters when you least expect me."

The old gentleman said he would always be welcome, and went on his way.

"More mystery!" muttered Hawk, as he hurried to his destination. "To think of Kotzka having that simple old German already in his power! The man is as deep as he is diabolical."

Clarisse's basement shutters seemed to be securely fastened, and there was no response to our hero's repeated rings for admittance.

Then, finding to his surprise that the street-door was unfastened, he entered the house.

A strange feeling came over him. An air of nameless horror and abandonment seemed to pervade the empty interior.

He called aloud upon the young woman's name, but there was no answer.

He hastily explored every apartment above the basement floor.

All were bare, as on the former occasion, except the one room out of which "Blithers" had appeared, and which he had been forbidden to enter.

This room he now entered.

It was richly furnished, but all the furniture was in the utmost confusion, as though having been searched or rifled by some one who had taken himself off in frantic haste.

Hawk did not stay to investigate.

Full of a strange foreboding, he hurried to the basement and knocked on Clarisse's door.

No answer.

He pounded, but with no better result.

Then he broke down the door, groped his way through the interior, threw open a sash, and flung wide a shutter for the admission of light.

His premonitions had not been for nothing.

The room was suggestive of a recent and horrible crime.

Chairs were overturned, the drawers of the dressing-case pulled out, their contents scattered, the bed disordered, ornaments smashed.

A knife, ruddily stained, lay in the middle of the floor.

Red blotches and gouts were upon the walls, and tresses of long, beautiful hair, as though torn out by the roots in a struggle for life with a merciless assailant, were scattered about the room.

Hawk staggered into a seat, horrified beyond measure.

"My God!" he gasped; "Clarisse has been murdered, and by that fiend, Kotzka! I see it all. Infuriated by her love for me, or her protection of Olga, perhaps her growing lukewarmness in his accused political projects, he has at last made way with her!"

Springing to his feet, he lighted a lamp and followed the trail of the sanguinary traces.

This led him out into the basement-hall, down the last flight of steps into the sub-cellar.

Here his worst fears appeared to be confirmed.

In the middle of the cellar a long trench—long enough for a newly-made grave—had recently been filled in and stamped down!

He leaned against the damp wall and contemplated this awfully-suggestive spot with indescribable feelings of horror and dismay.

Then he started, and listened.

He had heard the street-door opened violently.

Then came the sound of heavy footsteps trampling through the main hall and descending the stairs.

CHAPTER XXIII.

A BURIED SECRET DISENTOMBED.

APPALLED as he was at the thought of Clarisse's violent death at Kotzka's hands, our hero was for the moment incapable of action or even intelligent deliberation.

Nearer and nearer, lower and lower, approached the trampling feet.

At last they descended the cellar steps, and a face—the face of Kotzka, agrin with diabolical triumph and joy—peered at him through the semi-darkness.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the terrible, never-to-be-forgotten laugh. "What! are we bereaved? are we mourning for our beautiful Clarisse? Dig, dig, my falcon, if you would find her, peaceful and at rest! Falcons are given to soaring, that I know, but now there must be delving if the false, fair dove is to be seen and fondled yet once more! Ha, ha, ha!"

The hateful voice roused our hero to his wonted energy and dauntlessness.

Extinguishing his lamp, and casting it away, he drew his revolver, and dashed at Kotzka, who at once took to flight.

"Murderer! unparalleled monster!" shouted Hawk, springing up the steps in pursuit, and firing shot after shot at the huge fugitive; "do you bear a charmed life? Are you, indeed, bullet-proof?"

It seemed very like it, at all events.

Heedless of the shots that were poured, to all appearances, directly into his broad back, Kotzka bounded up stair after stair with surprising agility.

At last, with a parting roar of demoniac laughter, he disappeared into one upper furnished apartment, closing and fastening the door behind him.

But Hawk was now at the fever-heat that mocks at obstacles.

Pausing but a moment to charge his six-shooter with fresh cartridges, he hurled himself against the door like an avalanche.

Stout as it was, it gave way like paper before the fury of his onset.

Then he came to an exasperated pause in the middle of the room.

Kotzka had again disappeared!

But where? how?

The windows were closed and fastened on the inside.

The only remaining door opened into a shallow closet, which was empty.

The sole remaining aperture was the fire-

place, and the slenderest boy could not have crept up its narrow, rubbish-choked flue.

Hawk sounded the walls after the manner of an expert, but without detecting the slightest indication of a secret door or panel.

Wholly at a loss to account for the disappearance, he at last reluctantly retraced his steps.

Obtaining another light in the basement chamber of horror, he returned to the sub-cellar, whose environments were even more appalling.

Partly resolved to open the grave, if grave it were, he searched the cellar for some implement to assist him, but without finding any.

"The murderous fiend!" he muttered; "he seems to have forgotten no precaution."

Hawk was, however, none the less certain that Clarisse had been murdered and buried in that spot.

For the first time, though but for a moment, he permitted himself to indulge his grief.

Brief as had been the growth of his passion, he had come to love the strange and beautiful Clarisse with a great and absorbing love.

Only a short time before, she had seemed to reciprocate that love, and dreams of a rosy future had peopled his peril-hardened, danger-tried, but still susceptible heart.

And now!

Dead, ruthlessly murdered—perhaps losing her life through the very love for him which he had evoked—cut off in her glorious womanhood, her transcendent beauty!

It was indescribably terrible!

A well-remembered sound aroused him out of his horror-woven spell.

It was a sad sound, a sound between a sigh and a groan, accompanied by the clanking of a chain.

Ha! the invisible prisoner at the mouth of the tunnel!

Was the solution of this mystery already in his grasp, after baffling him so long and repeatedly?

Yes; he would investigate it at once, and the work might in some measure distract him from the thought of his murdered love.

Proceeding to the mouth of the tunnel, he carefully scrutinized a portion of the masonry, guided by the sounds which continued at intervals.

At length he found a round iron button, imbedded in the masonry near the ground.

He pressed it with his thumb.

Instantly a narrow door, in cunning imitation of the stone-work framing it, swung slowly open in obedience to a secret spring.

It disclosed a short, cramped passage, with a door, partly ajar, at the further end, from which rays of light were issuing, as well as the sounds he had heard.

After studying the nature of the secret spring-lock with a practiced eye, Hawk entered the passage, closing the door behind him.

He then crept along noiselessly, and peered through the half-open door.

What he saw riveted him to the ground for a moment with intense astonishment. As he continued to look, this expression gave way to one of recognition, in which there was also joy, hope and a world of pity.

This is what he saw:

First, the interior of a large, well-furnished, well-warmed prison cell, with even a brisk little grate-fire sparkling in one corner, and lighted by an iron bracket-lamp, but with no window, loophole or other opening than the door of entrance.

Next, an old man seated listlessly at a table. His hair and beard were white as snow, the latter falling far down upon his breast. He was comfortably clad, and apparently well cared for, but his eyes indicated imbecility, perhaps a total loss of memory, and even consciousness of his surroundings. Strong, but not heavy, chains shackled his wrists and ankles. His frequent movement of those members caused the clanking sounds, and he often sighed mournfully.

Hawk drew a long breath, and his eyes glistened in a way that he would not have had noticed.

Then, setting down his lamp, he glided into the cell, and placed his hand on the captive's shoulder.

The latter looked up apathetically, and muttered something in a foreign tongue.

"Speak English or French!" said Hawk, in his clear, incisive tones.

"Eh? what?" muttered the old man, surveying him with indifference. "Who are you? What do you want? I want Clarisse!"

A spasm of pain shot over the detective's stern face.

The old man had uttered the name tenderly—almost like a little child pining for its accustomed nurse.

"Alas!" thought Hawk, "the poor old captive is to be envied in this, that he will hardly appreciate her death."

Then he bent his lips, and whispered a name—the prisoner's own name, or one that he had once possessed.

"Eh? Who speaks?" he cried, suddenly starting up as if with the glimmerings of an almost faded intelligence. "Who calls me by the old strong title?"

"I, Hawk Heron! Come, stir up the embers

of your memory, my friend! Do you not recall me?"

But the momentary luster faded out of the plaintive gaze fixed upon him, and the prisoner relapsed into his apathy.

"Go, go!" said he, pettishly; "the man you speak of is dead—long dead—his name a lost echo! I want Clarisse!"

The detective made more efforts to awaken the dormant faculties, but with no better success.

At last he hissed into the old man's ear:

"Clarisse can come to you no more! But would not another answer in her place—Kotzka, for instance?"

The effect of that name was magical.

Fire leaped into the dim eyes, the sunken breast heaved tumultuously, mingled rage and fear distorted the aged face.

"Kotzka!" the old man almost screamed. "No, no; not him! The traitor, the renegade, the fiend!"

"Ha! renegade, traitor? Could we but prove as much!"

"Not him, not him! I would kill him—I would tear him to pieces—or he should kill me!"

The utterance was more feeble now, but the eyes still blazed, and the shriveled fingers were working convulsively.

"Now try to recall my features," said Hawk, impressively. "Seize this awakening of your smoldering faculties ere it fades again! Study me well!"

The prisoner obeyed. A troubled look came into his face, he placed his hand to his forehead, but that was all.

The detective fixed his soul-burning, penetrating gaze into those aged and troubled eyes.

Then, slowly baring his breast, he presented to their view the emblem ineffaceably delineated there—the proud falcon striking down his vulture enemy in mid-air.

"Look, call up the past, remember!" he exclaimed, in his piercing whisper. "Do you not recall me now?"

The test was successful.

The troubled, clouded look slowly faded, giving way to a startled, joyous expression.

Then, struggling to his feet, the old prisoner threw his arms around the detective's neck and burst into a flood of tears.

"The past gives up its dead!" he sobbed. "Hawk Heron! my son, my son, the child of my adoption!"

Before the prisoner relapsed into his imbecility, which was not very long, many revelations passed between him and the detective.

The departure of the latter was scarcely noticed, but Hawk promised himself that the old captive should henceforth be his special care.

"Clarisse, my murdered love," he murmured, "thy gentle ministrations to this old man must henceforth be my task."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE WEB YET WEAVING.

RETURNING to the horror-haunted cellar, the detective was seized with a fresh fit of indecision.

Even had the requisite tools been at hand, he could not have thought again of opening that new-made grave, if grave it were.

What then should he do?

Notify the police?

No, not that!

He still had a feebly glimmering hope that Clarisse might not have been really murdered, after all; that these sanguinary traces had merely been cunningly contrived to deceive him.

Besides, he clung stubbornly to his original vaunt of clearing up this tissue of mysteries and horrors singly, or at least without an iota of aid from his professional brethren.

He would stand or fall alone.

After coming to this determination, he lost no more time in quitting the accursed house.

Having found the street-door key on the inside, he made the entrance fast and put the key in his pocket.

It was about eight o'clock.

He was sauntering past the adjoining stoop when a female figure, whose face was muffled almost out of sight, passed up the steps and began fitting a key to the door.

"Oho! Mynheer Schmidt's odd landlady," thought Hawk, slipping into a place of concealment. "Let us wait a bit."

Before the old woman could effect an entrance, Mr. Schmidt himself came along, and ascended the steps.

Hawk could readily hear what passed between them.

"Ah, Madame Dupont, is it you?" said the old German, genially. "And may I assist madame in fitting the key?"

The woman mumbled an unintelligible answer and then the lock yielded.

"I hope monsieur likes his apartments," the old woman then said, while both remained standing on the top step. "If anything more can be done for monsieur's comfort, monsieur has but to speak."

The accent was a strongly foreign one, and the voice a deep guttural.

Mr. Schmidt rubbed his hands. His new

lodgings were everything he could desire, he said, and he could only hope that madame was equally pleased with her lodger.

"Monsieur plays upon many instruments," said the old woman. "Monsieur does not retire until very late."

Mr. Schmidt hung his head like a scolded schoolboy, and began a rambling apology.

She cut him short. Monsieur's musical exercises did not annoy her, but her poor husband! He mostly came home very late, and undisturbed sleep was indispensable to him.

Would monsieur kindly say what time he usually found forgetfulness in slumber? Then madame's poor husband could regulate his retirement to something like an accustomed hour.

Mr. Schmidt rubbed his hands afresh, and smiled all over.

He was happy to inform madame that by two in the morning he was usually folded in the arms of Morpheus.

That was well; and was monsieur in the habit of sleeping soundly?

Oh, yes; Mr. Schmidt thanked Heaven, his age and fine digestion that, once fairly asleep, a cannon-shot's concussion on his ear-drum would hardly avail to arouse him.

That was yet better; madame realized by her chronic face-pains that sound sleep was an immeasurable blessing.

The old German went into the house, still smiling benevolently, but the other remained standing in the doorway, looking up and down the street.

"You're a deep one, old lady!" said Hawk to himself. "What can be brewing against the simple old German, and what would I not give for a study of your features?"

He was about to slip away unobserved when heavy footsteps were heard approaching rapidly.

The old woman manifested expectation, and then a powerful figure passed under a near street-lamp.

"Blithers, by all that's wonderful!" murmured Hawk, resuming his watch. "Come, come; it grows interesting."

The old woman's manner was obsequious, and that of the Scotland Yard detective gruff to incivility, as he ascended the steps.

"Any news?" he asked in French.

"None," was the reply in the same language.

"The old German?"

"All is satisfactory."

"Have you procured me the missing names for my list?"

"Yes."

"Without exciting suspicion?"

"Yes."

"The German's room is accessible?"

"It will be later."

"Eh bien, let us go in."

They entered the house, closing the door.

"Short and sweet!" commented Hawk, coming out of his concealment. "Oho, Mr. Blithers, my guess as to your deep game is doubtless correct! You are maneuvering to sell out these plotters to the Czar's Government, as the price for getting your detective's grip on Kotzka, and thus capturing both the Russian and the English rewards. But let us wait and see who will first run him to earth, the British bulldog or the American bloodhound!"

In fact, Hawk could not abstain from a sense of admiration of what he imagined as Blithers's deep game.

Then he found himself confronted by a counter-reflection.

"True," he muttered, "but how account for the *pardon* offered in the secretary's letter, in addition to the reward?"

Finding this too hard a nut to crack, he turned his thoughts elsewhere.

"What can old Schmidt have in his possession that Kotzka covets?" he thought. "Let me see; at all events I should be on hand at two in the morning, to look after his safety."

He re-entered what had now become a house of horror, and made his way to the rear yard.

A narrow extension ran along the first story back of all the houses in the block.

A light was shining from Mr. Schmidt's third story window adjoining, and presently the notes of a flute came out upon the crisp night air.

Hawk discovered that he could easily, on occasion, make his way along the extension roofs, and thence, by the waterspout and other footholds, up into the old German's rooms.

He was about to retrace his steps, when a second story window of the Dupont domicile was softly raised, and a burly figure slipped out on the extension roof.

It was Kotzka, a revolver in one hand, a dagger in the other.

Enough light issued from the windows above to enable Hawk to recognize him.

"Heavens!" thought the latter, as he crouched near the fence while regarding the giant's movements. "Can Blithers know of his danger—his close proximity to the dangerous man whose betrayal he is plotting?"

He drew his own pistol, and sighted the giant's head for a target, but his sober second thought withheld his finger at the trigger, though the temptation was a powerful one.

"No, no!" he murmured, putting up the weapon; "though the blood of Clarisse now

swells the cry for vengeance on his head, I must take him alive, alive! His doom must be the scaffold, the gibbet and the throttling cord!"

Kotzka only remained on the extension roof a few moments.

He seemed to bend his gaze inquiringly on the lighted windows above.

Suspicion and distrust were in his manner and attitude.

Hawk felt sure that if the old German had ventured to thrust out his head at that moment, it would have cost him his life.

He therefore felt relieved when Kotzka slipped back through the window.

"How did the villain get through the dividing wall, out of that room into which I cornered him?" thought our hero, as he made his way back to the street. "That is a mystery yet to be solved."

He had hardly issued from the door, when he shrunk back.

A hackney coach had just driven up to the adjoining house.

"Oho!" thought Hawk, with his eyes peeled; "what a pity that it isn't our black-and-yellow *coupe*, with our Monsier Dupont on the box, and the big dapple-gray! That would cap the climax!"

But it was an altogether different species of turnout.

A moment later, Blithers ran hurriedly down the adjoining stoop, sprung into the coach, and was driven off.

Hawk made a movement to start in pursuit.

But at that instant, a small, active figure darted into view and leaped behind the vanishing vehicle with the agility and stealthiness of a monkey.

Hawk had recognized the figure.

"My faithful henchman! my own little Nixey!" he muttered. "Like a young but true sleuth-hound, he's fastened to his trail."

Hawk had some more business at Police Headquarters before keeping his midnight appointment with his associates.

He therefore hurried away in his turn from the decidedly sensational precincts of Melton place.

CHAPTER XXV.

TANGLED THREADS.

HAWK and Seagrave were on time at the Pig and Whistle rendezvous, but Nixey arrived ten minutes late, looking considerably blown.

"How are we with our reports?" inquired the detective, as they took their seats in the little private room.

Seagrave shook his head, while Nixey looked radiant.

"Well, bad news first. Heave ahead, Ralph."

"I have failed to find the missing half of the Russian manuscript," said Seagrave. "That's the long and short of it, Hawk."

"It had not been left in the black-and-yellow *coupe*, then?"

"Not having the felicity of searching, or even seeing, the black-and-yellow *coupe*, I can't say."

"What do you mean?"

"It disappeared five minutes after being driven to the precinct station by the policeman."

"What explanation was offered?"

"None. The officers were as much mystified as I."

"This is very extraordinary!"

"I should say so. There was a commotion at the station entrance, it seems, at the time the *coupe* was driven there. A bunch of drunkards was being taken in. The policeman having the *coupe* in charge quitted the box for a few minutes, to assist his fellow-officers. When he returned to look for the turnout, it was gone."

"Have you tried to trace it?"

"Everywhere, but in vain."

"Ah, well! doubtless the scrap of paper would not have been found in it, after all."

"I feel sure it would, could I only have searched the interior."

"Why?"

"Because, from the *feel* of things, I obtained the fragment in our possession by tearing it from the rest, which had somehow got wedged in between the seat-cushion and the upholstery at the side."

"Oho!"

"Yes; and I am sure that the missing fragment has remained there, unperceived even if the *coupe* may have been occupied a dozen times since."

"Good! Then the *coupe* must be found."

"It has been found, boss."

Nixey interpolated this, very quietly, but with his impish grin.

"Ha!" exclaimed Hawk, both delighted and surprised. "Are you there, my little true-penny?"

"Yes, boss; an' it's no fault of Mr. Seagrave's that he couldn't track the black-an'-yeller *coupe*."

"Well, it's your turn, my lad."

Nixey was quite ready with his report.

"I didn't get out of bed, boss, till the middle of the afternoon. Then it was nigh on to dusk before I caught on to Mr. Blithers. It was in the Brunswick vestibule, an' I had tough work keepin' out of sight while keepin' him in sight. At half-past eight a district messenger

brought him a note. There wasn't any reply. Then Mr. Blithers skipped away in a hurry."

"You still shadowed him?"

"Straight to Melton place, and on foot, boss. He disappeared, not in Miss Clarisse's house, but in 34, next door, after chinnin' a little with an old gal on the stoop."

"True."

"Then a fireman vanished into the next house, boss, that I now see must have been yourself."

"True."

"Then, in less than ten minutes, a public coach drew up to 34. When it druv away, Mr. Blithers was inside an' I was behind, boss."

"True, again; I saw you."

"Mr. Blithers druv to 890 Madison avenue, a handsome, bang-up private residence."

"Aha! we must find out who lives there."

"I have found that out, boss."

"Who, then?"

"Count Rudovoski, the Russian Consul."

Both Hawk and Seagrave gave a surprised start, while the former quickly produced the torn fragment that had been translated.

"See!" exclaimed Hawk. "The letters 'dovoski' would just fill out this third line, making the whole read, 'Count Rudovoski.' Truly, we're in luck. Go ahead, Nixey."

"Mr. Blithers stayed in that bang-up crib a long time, boss. He was then druv to the big old brewery buildin' with me still at his back. He stayed in there a long time, boss; maybe he's there yet."

"How so?"

"Because I didn't see him come out again, boss; but, after a long time, somebody else came out in his stead."

"Who?"

"Kotzka."

"You astonish me."

"It astonished me, too, boss; you might 'a' knocked me down with a feather."

"Well, did Kotzka get into the coach Blithers had occupied?"

"The coach had druv off, a minute or two before, boss, and the black-an'-yeller *coupe* taken its place."

"What! with the original driver?"

"The identical, Simon Pure, original Jacobs, boss, side-whiskers included."

"So! Well, what then?"

"Kotzka jumped into the *coupe*, an' was driven off."

"And you?"

"I was hangin' on behind like a postage-stamp, boss, though it was all-fired tough work, there bein' no foot-hold, an' I was mighty glad when they came to the next stoppin'-place."

"Where?"

"One hundred and tenth street, corner Seventh avenue, at the top of Central Park."

"At what sort of house?"

"None at all, boss. There was empty lots on one side, the Park on the other."

"Well?"

"Kotzka jumped out, an' said to the driver, says he, 'You'll be at the house I told you of an hour before sunrise?' 'Yes,' says the driver. 'Will it be best,' says Kotzka, 'to cross at Fulton Ferry, or by the bridge?' 'By the bridge,' says the driver. 'Don't fail then,' says Kotzka. 'I'll have the young lady in readiness.' That was all, boss."

Both Hawk and Seagrave had been worked up to a high pitch.

"All!" echoed the former. "But what followed?"

"The *coupe* whipped off, boss, while Kotzka cut across some empty lots, with me at his heels. Fast as I ran, he ran faster. I lost track of him, an' here I am, boss."

"How long ago was this?"

"Less'n an hour, boss. Havin' lost my man, I made tracks for the Third Avenue Elevated, an' here I am."

"Well and good!" said the detective, rubbing his hands. "This is better, far better than I had hoped for."

"What do you infer from it all?" asked Seagrave.

"Why, it is obvious. Kotzka has Olga temporarily in hiding somewhere in Harlem. But he has also provided some securer place of confinement for her over in Brooklyn. The transfer is to be effected this very morning. The *coupe* will cross the Brooklyn Bridge, with Kotzka and his prisoner inside, at say half-an-hour after sunrise. That is, the attempt to do so will be made. We must be on hand to prevent it, or at least to rescue Olga, say midway on the bridge roadway, without attracting undue attention from the police."

"Ay," exclaimed Seagrave, "and perhaps recover the missing half of the telltale paper at the same time!"

"Certainly."

"Kotzka will make a hard fight for the young lady," suggested Nixey.

"That stands to reason," said Hawk. "But can we ask for anything better than a fair fight with him on open ground?"

"Not I, for one," growled Seagrave. "His head can hardly be so bullet-proof as his body."

"I owe him one for firin' me down the hotel elevator," said Nixey. "The Short Tails always gets even sooner or later."

"This shall be our programme, then," said Hawk. "Let us now separate, to meet at the Brooklyn Bridge entrance at sunrise. This will give us time to perfect our plan."

"Why do you leave us now, boss?" asked Nixey.

"Intermediate duties call me back to Melton place," said Hawk.

He then told them briefly of the thrilling discoveries he had made at No. 32 Melton place.

His companions were scarcely less horrified at the recital than he had been making the discoveries.

"Come, we'll think no more of this at present," at last said the detective, rising. "Only we shall henceforth have the murder of poor Clarisse, as an additional incentive to our zeal."

They quitted the Pig and Whistle in each other's company, passing around the yawning street excavation made by the steam explosion of the preceding morning, when Hawk once more separated from his friends.

The weather had long before this cleared off beautifully, the ice had disappeared, a balmy atmosphere had succeeded the cold storm, and the sky was studded with stars.

Hawk had two objects, as the reader may recollect, in returning to Melton place.

He wished, first, to visit once more the aged prisoner of the tunnel-cell, and devise some means for his speedy removal thence.

After that it was his intention to climb over the extension roofs at the rear, gain one of the back windows of old Mr. Schmidt's new apartments, and look after the occupant's safety, and perhaps have a secret interview with him, for the purpose of putting him on his guard.

He ought to effect this latter object, in view of what he had overheard, by two o'clock at the latest, and it was now past one.

Arriving at No. 32 Melton place, his former sense of horror took possession of him.

It was the deadest, the darkest, the most solemn hour of the night.

He thought of the scene of horror in the basement, the ghastly trench in the cellar, the appalling surroundings through which he must once more pass in order to reach the old captive.

A momentary sense of faintness seized him, his knees smote each other, he could hardly place the key in the lock.

He recovered himself by a great effort.

"This is childish!" he muttered. "Is not the future care of this poor, forlorn old captive a duty that I owe to the memory of Clarisse?"

He strode into the house, lighted a lamp which he had left convenient to his hand, and closed and fastened the door behind him.

He first made a thorough examination of all the upper rooms, and assured himself that this time there was no lurking foe in that quarter.

Descending to the basement, he skirted the room of horror, not without a shudder, and made his way again into the sub-cellar.

He forced himself, however, to examine the trench once more, to note if its surface might have been disturbed since his first visit.

It was well that he did so.

Not only did the surface show that it had been dug over, at least in part, but a spade was standing in the fresh-trampled earth.

Wrapped about its handle was a piece of white paper.

Full of frightful anticipations he snatched it, and read the following words, inscribed in a coarse, scrawling hand:

"There are two sleeping below here now. Dig, if you dare!"

What could it mean?

Hawk suddenly dropped the paper, gripped his lamp more tightly and flew to the tunnel entrance.

No need to press any secret spring now!

The door was already open.

He threaded the passage, and gained the cell.

It was empty!

Moreover, there were signs of another desperate struggle.

As in the chamber of horrors above, the walls were stained with ruddy gouts and blotches, and the floor was strewn with locks of hair, as if torn out by the roots, only the hair was thin and white, instead of thick and bright.

For a moment the detective was once more unnerved.

"God of vengeance!" he gasped, staggering back; "is there no limit to this fiend Kotzka's iniquity?"

Then rushing back into the cellar he set down his lamp, and began to dig up the trench like a madman.

He had not a doubt that continued labor would disclose the murdered form of the old captive, as well as that of Clarisse.

But he presently encountered a layer of very hard and compact earth, and came to a breathless pause.

In this pause he suddenly bethought himself of his second duty in that appalling vicinity—his watch and ward over the old music teacher.

He consulted his watch.

Five minutes past two!

Heavens, the sleeping German might already be in the toils of unsuspected foes.

Not altogether sorry, however, for the press-

ing duty that called him from the ghastly task before him, he threw down the spade, picked up the lamp, and passed up the stairs.

Entering a rear room on the second floor, he extinguished the lamp, and climbed out upon the extension roof.

A dim light shining out of a top room of the adjoining house indicated that as the one in which Mr. Schmidt most likely slept.

The windows below it emitted no light.

Gliding noiselessly along the extension roofs, Hawk examined the waterspout fastenings.

They seemed secure.

A moment later, he was making his way slowly and laboriously up the rear wall of No. 34, but without making the least noise.

The top of one of the lower shutters presently afforded him a stanch foothold.

He drew himself up carefully, obtained a half-sitting posture on the ledge above, and peered through the panes into the interior.

Yes; he had guessed aright.

Mr. Schmidt's apartments were three in number, communicating directly with each other, and this one into which our hero was peering was his sleeping room.

The light, afforded by a lowered lamp standing upon a wash-stand, was sufficient to disclose the simple interior.

The sleeping form of the old German, snugly tucked in his bed, was the first object Hawk's eyes rested on, and it gave him much satisfaction.

"So, I am still in time," he muttered. "As I can't maintain this position very long, I had better slip in there and give him warning."

He paused, however, with his hand on the sash.

A stealthy figure had just crept into the room, by its passage-door, and was regarding the sleeping man with a steadfast and distrustful gaze.

It was Mr. Schmidt's landlady, and in one hand she grasped a long and gleaming knife.

Hawk could not see the face belonging to the figure at first.

But when it was at last partly turned toward him, the accustomed bandages had been stripped away, and the features were revealed to him.

He gave a gasp of surprise as he recognized them.

So great was his astonishment, that he just saved himself from losing his balance and falling headlong from his perch.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MUSIC-TEACHER'S SECRET.

WHY had the suddenly revealed physiognomy of Madame Dupont, the old German's landlady, so astounded the Falcon Detective?

Because there was no landlady, no Madame Dupont.

There was only a fictitious landlady, a *pseudo* Madame Dupont, in the person of Monsieur Dupont, the thick-bodied, side-whiskered driver of the black-and-yellow *coupe*.

He was now observed to engage in a systematic search of the apartment, after first assuring himself of the genuineness and soundness of the old man's sleep.

It was equally evident that he had only carried the knife as a precautionary measure.

The stealthy search was gradually extended to the sleeper's garments, which lay upon a chair by the bed, and finally to the bed itself.

In the latter place it seemed to prove successful.

He drew from under the bolster a bundle of documents, apparently yellow with age.

These he inspected carefully, holding them close to the light.

They were evidently what he had been looking for.

A smile of satisfaction came into his face, and he vanished with them as stealthily as he had appeared.

Then Hawk gently raised the window, and stepped into the room.

He felt sure that the thief would not return, and he had had his own reasons for not interrupting his proceedings.

By using great caution, he managed to arouse Mr. Schmidt without any noise, and explained the situation in a low tone.

When the old German had sat up in bed, and recovered from his surprise, besides mastering the state of affairs, he smiled, and seemed to accept his loss with much equanimity.

"Were not the papers valuable?" inquired Hawk.

"No, my friend," was the smiling reply, "for they were only duplicates, mere copies, which I had prepared for just such an emergency."

"Duplicates?"

"Yes, my young friend."

Mr. Schmidt opened the bosom of his night-dress, and displayed a dingy buckskin belt about his body.

"The real, the original documents are here, next my heart," said he. "I can afford to leave the shams in the thief's possession, my son. That will render the real ones more secure."

"Capital! May I ask what they refer to?"

"Certainly, my son. They are the proofs of

my beautiful, murdered Olga's paternity and antecedents. Alas! she will need them no more, but I have treasured them."

Hawk made a gesture of astonishment.

For the moment he had lost sight of Mr. Schmidt's delusion as to the death and burial of Olga.

He recollected himself.

Should he disturb that illusion now?

No; safer to wait.

"Where did you obtain these documents, myn-heer?" he asked.

"They were drawn up, and legally attested, by the poor widow Ashcombe a fortnight before her barbarous death."

"Ha!"

"Yes, my young friend. I have worn them next to my heart ever since."

"I thought you had implicit confidence in me."

"Why, my son, so I have."

"Then why did you not tell me of these important papers before?"

"To what end, my son? Had Olga only lived—"

"True, true; I had forgotten."

"Forgotten Olga's death!"

"No, no; but—let it pass! Why, then, have you preserved the papers so religiously?"

"Ah! they might be of benefit to another—to one other still living, for all I know to the contrary."

Hawk had become intensely interested.

He tip-toed to the passage-door, securely fastened it, and returned to the bedside.

"Will you let me examine the documents?" said he. "It is of immense importance that I should do so—of more importance than I can explain just now."

Mr. Schmidt hesitated a moment.

Then taking off the buckskin belt, he produced some papers from amid its folds, and handed them to Hawk.

The papers were three in number, two of which were very old, and with foreign seals affixed, while the other was of recent construction.

The detective devoured their contents with eager and glistening eyes.

They were, as he had hoped, of immense importance, not only to Olga, but to another, still living.

"Tell me the history of your obtaining these priceless papers," said Hawk, returning them to Mr. Schmidt, who secured them as before.

"That may be briefly told, my son," said the old German. "It was after the widow began to fear that Kotzka was on her track that she thought of making this provision for Olga's future in the event of her own death."

"About a fortnight prior to the—the tragedy you say?"

"Yes; or about the time she must have got an inkling of the gigantic stranger attending Olga's performances so persistently and ominously."

"But two of the documents are foreign and of very old date."

"Yes; but you will have observed that they were newly attested by her before a notary."

"True."

"The same notary drew up the remaining document, which chiefly relates to the history of the older ones, at her dictation. It is signed by her, and her signature is duly attested."

"Yes; the documents are thoroughly legal."

"You may well say that, my son; but little good can they now do the unfortunate Olga."

"How came you to think of having copies, or *fac-similes*, of the documents made out?"

"It was the good widow's precaution, not mine. Ah, she was a wise, a wonderful woman! Then she solemnly intrusted all the papers to my care. The event of this night has confirmed the wisdom of her precaution."

"Indeed, it has; and the precious originals are now safer in your custody than ever before."

"Ah! I am now at my ease."

Hawk reflected a moment.

"There is another thing, mynheer," said he at length, "that still surprises me greatly."

"What is it?"

"Your equanimity on my first apprising you of your *pseudo* landlady being a man in female disguise."

"Ah; I was partly prepared for it."

"Since when?"

"Since a short time before retiring to my bed. Wait a little."

Mr. Schmidt arose and partly dressed himself.

He then took the lamp and led the way into an adjoining room.

This was a small and dark intermediate apartment, between the bed-chamber and the front room, which the old gentleman had devoted to the purposes of a sort of lumber room.

It contained a fireplace, covered by an iron fireboard, and in the middle of this fireboard was a hot-air register, the slats of which were now closed.

Mr. Schmidt set down the lamp, and pointed to the register.

"Last night, at about midnight," said he, in a whisper, "I chanced to be in here looking over some of this old luggage, which I brought here only yesterday from the place where it had long

been stored. The slats of that register happened to be open."

"Ah, I begin to understand."

"Yes, my friend. Presently I heard, by means of the register flue, low voices in earnest conversation in the room below."

"Was one of the voices Kotzka's?"

"Having never heard that monster's voice, to the best of my recollection, I cannot say, my son. But I have an impression that neither voice was his."

This impression was borne out by Hawk's recalling Nixey's report, which made it impossible that the voice should have been Kotzka's at that particular time.

"The other voice, however," continued Mr. Schmidt, "I had no difficulty in recognizing."

"Aha! the lady's of the incurable face-ache, your worthy landlady's?"

"The same, my son, and yet in such unguardedly masculine tones that I more than half divined the secret of her disguise."

"What were they talking about?"

"That I could only make out in part, for I could not distinctly overhear all their words."

"What did you infer from what you were able to overhear?"

"That the pair were to join in some sort of expedition that was to be set on foot at a later hour. I heard the words 'bridge' and 'ferry' repeated several times, as if the exact route had not been decided upon."

Hawk gave a joyful start.

"What else?" he demanded.

"Nothing more that I could make out, my son, save that the man talking to Dupont was to rejoin him at a later hour."

"How long did they converse together?"

"Only a few minutes. They then both went away. After hearing the street door open and shut, I peeped out of one of my front windows, and saw the two men hurry away."

The detective glanced at his companion for some moments in a peculiar way.

"So!" said he at last. "After making this discovery, together with the suggestions it must have prompted, you could coolly seek your couch at your usual hour, and compose yourself to the oblivion of slumber?"

"Certainly, my son."

"And without even fastening your doors?"

"It has never been my habit to fasten myself in my rooms, my friend."

This with unaffected simplicity.

"But, after what you had overheard, did not the thought occur to you that your rooms might be feloniously entered while you were asleep?"

Mr. Schmidt smiled ingenuously.

"Ah, yes, to be sure," said he. "But what else might a thief find, my son, but the duplicate papers that were in readiness for him?"

The detective softly but emphatically slapped him on the back.

"Bravo, mynheer!" said he. "You have a cool courage I would scarcely have given you credit for."

Mr. Schmidt was about to respond, when he paused, listening intently.

Then he softly stooped to the register, and opened the slats of it with the utmost caution.

He arose, holding up his finger warningly.

"Hush!" he whispered. "The two are again together in the room below. We may overhear what they say."

CHAPTER XXVII.

TRAPPED AGAIN.

THE next instant both Hawk and the old German were bending their ears before the tell-tale register, eagerly listening for what it might disclose.

They had not long to wait.

At first they could only hear footsteps moving about the room below, with an occasional monosyllable or two.

Then a harsh, guttural voice, which the listeners ascribed to Dupont, made some remark in a foreign tongue.

This was responded to by a softer, deprecating voice, in the same language.

After that the interchange proceeded in broken English, the purport of which was for the most part distinctly overheard.

"But that doesn't explain why you are so late," said Dupont. "Should the Master learn of your tardiness, Rudolph, he would be furious."

"But, my dear Arnold," responded the voice of Rudolph, as he had been addressed, "you surely will not be so unkind as to notify the Master."

"Ah! you think so?"

"But let me be sure of it! Besides, I am not so late, after all."

"You should have come earlier."

"But it is still nearly two good hours before sunrise."

"Think where we have to drive to, though, before reaching the bridge."

"I know—away up yonder in Harlem. But the good dapple-gray is rapid of gait."

"Ay, but harder to drive than ever, since that upset in front of the old brewery. I could

hardly steal him from the police station, and he has been nervous ever since."

"Is the Master still furious over that affair, Arnold?"

"Yes; but more about the missing memorandum than anything else."

"Was it so very important?"

"You would think so if you could have noticed the change that has come over the Master since its loss."

"How is he changed?"

"Oh, in fifty ways. He has grown alarmed and haggard. He falls into moody reveries, and starts out of them with looks of affright."

"Fright in connection with the great Kotzka? That is odd."

"It is none the less true, Rudolph. One would imagine that the lost paper might cost him his life."

"So it would, if entire," thought our hero. "Oh, if we had but the missing half of it!"

"Have you any idea of the nature of the lost paper, Arnold?" pursued Rudolph's voice.

"Not I."

"Yet you might have—"

"Enough of this! Would I dare meddle with the Master's private affairs?"

"But where does he think he lost it?"

"Somewhere in the crowd when the *coupe* was upset."

"Might he not have left it in the *coupe*?"

"No; I have looked through the vehicle without finding a trace of it."

"Ah!" thought Hawk again, "if I only might make a search there."

"I say, Arnold."

"Well, Rudolph?"

"What if that missing paper might have fallen into certain other hands at the time of the upset?"

"Whose, for instance?"

"Those of the man whom the Master seems to fear more than aught else in the wide world, and yet has a strange liking or leniency for—this Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective."

"Hush!" exclaimed Dupont's voice, with an inflection of terror. "Do not even hint such a thing, Rudolph."

"Wherefore?"

"Lest these very walls might hear and report your words to the Master."

"But—"

"Hush, I say! That dreadful supposition has already occurred to the Master—I am sure of it—and it sets him into a frenzy."

"Of fear?"

"Of fear or rage, or both. How should I determine?"

"Still, one would think—"

"No more of this, I tell you! Not another word!"

There was an interval of silence, after which Rudolph's voice took up another thread.

"Where is this house to which we are to drive for our load?" it inquired.

"In Harlem."

"I know that, but whereabouts in Harlem?"

"You will know when we get there."

"You don't say so!"

"I thought I did."

"May I ask another question?"

"As many as you like, since I can answer or not, as I choose."

"Since you have heretofore always driven the *coupe* alone, why am I now ordered to accompany you?"

"Because you are so ordered."

"But I can't imagine why."

"It isn't necessary that you should; but I presume you are to assist me in event of an emergency."

"What emergency could possibly arise?"

"Hasn't many a one clustered around the old black-and-yellow vehicle before this?"

"Yes; but now, at this lonely hour?"

"Ah! well. The young lady might make outcries. Then, again, why might not that infernal detective and his subordinates intercept us again? That fellow is a chameleon with a charmed life."

"True. One more question."

"Ouf! still another?"

"Yes."

"Well, out with it."

"Is our destination distant after we cross the bridge?"

"Yes; an isolated house far back in Brooklyn, bordering on Prospect Park. I have only been there once. The building was formerly a private Insane Asylum, I have understood."

[Hawk rubbed his hands.]

"Is everything in readiness for our reception there?" Rudolph's voice went on.

"Never fear. Does the Master ever do anything half-way?"

"No; and yet this is very strange."

"What is?"

"That he should go so far away from our Society's head-quarters."

"Does he intend to live over there, you fool?"

"Doubtless not; but I wouldn't have thought he would have chosen any new retreat so far away."

"Perhaps he couldn't help himself."

"Aha! Like enough. Now, do you know, Arnold, it is my habit—"

"Hist!"

The interruption was in a quick, alarmed tone, and then there was a long silence.

The eavesdroppers were beginning to fear that their game was suspected, when the conversation was resumed where it had broken off.

It was accompanied by a sound of movements, as though Dupont might be dressing for his expedition, with his companion's assistance.

"There, that will do," said Dupont's voice. "Don't tie it any tighter. What were you about to say?"

"I was on the point of saying that it is mostly my habit, Arnold, to mind my own private affairs exclusively, but that this doesn't prevent other folks' affairs sometimes becoming both interesting and problematic."

"Oh, indeed. Whose affairs do you particularly refer to?"

"The Master's."

"Beware, Rudolph!"

"Yes, yes; but I can't help thinking that he had better have fewer private affairs, and devote himself more exclusively to the affairs of our Order."

"Beware, I tell you."

"But there's a plenty of the brethren of my way of thinking."

"Dare they?"

"Yes, and a great deal more, Arnold, let me tell you that."

"What do they think?"

"They think that Kotzka's manners and actions are daily growing more incomprehensible, not to say suspicious, to the brethren. There are those, indeed, who dare to hint that he might be meditating—"

The rest of the sentence was inaudible to the secret listeners.

"Impossible!" exclaimed Dupont's voice. "Even Kotzka would not venture upon such a thought. A vision of the Order's vengeance would paralyze such an idea in its very germ!"

"One would think so, and yet—"

"No more of this—we are on dangerous ground. Now, Rudolph, to change the subject, just run down into the basement, and find my whip for me. We must be off shortly."

There came the sound of a door opening and shutting, and this was followed by a profound silence.

The two listeners retained their kneeling posture at the register in breathless suspense to hear more.

Suddenly the two doors, front and rear, were closed with a bang and locked upon them.

Then a mocking laugh sounded outside of each.

"We're entrapped!" exclaimed the detective, springing to his feet. "Heavens! I see it all. Our presence was discovered after that first interruption—their subsequent conversation was designed merely to lull us into a false sense of security."

"Truly, my son, it must be as you say," said the professor, lugubriously. "But you fastened the door between the passage and the rear room?"

"Yes, but what would that have availed against such rascals? Besides, does not another passage-door open into the front room?"

"Yes."

"The deuce!"

Then the mocking laughs were repeated, and there was heard the sound of shooting bolts.

Then retreating steps were heard, the opening and closing of the street-door, and the rattle of a vehicle being swiftly driven away.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

WILD WORK.

THE detective exerted his tried door-breaking force against each fastening, but without success.

"Alas, my son!" exclaimed the old German; "you heard them bolted, as well as locked."

"True."

"And I have noticed that all the doors are of great thickness. We must remain here till liberated from the outside."

Hawk consulted his watch.

Only an hour before sunrise.

"That might suit you, mynheer, but not me," said he. "Which door is the least secure, think you?"

"This one, leading into the front room, if my memory is not at fault."

Hawk coolly drew his revolver.

"Oh, my young friend! what would you do?" cried his companion. "You have no enemy here."

"You are mistaken, mynheer. That door is just now my enemy, and it is indispensable that I should quit this house inside of a quarter of an hour."

With that he began to shoot away the opposing lock and bolts.

Fortunately, the closeness of the room deadened the sound of the shots.

It was a task that required the repeated reloading and emptying of every chamber of his revolver.

Luckily, it was of heavy caliber and there was no lack of cartridges.

The last fastening finally yielded, and, push-

ing open the perforated door, he strode into the front room.

"Bring in the lamp, mynheer; let us take a look around."

As the old man obeyed, Hawk examined the door leading into the passage.

This had also been secured.

"I have no more ammunition to spare for this sort of warfare," said Hawk. "Escape by these front windows is my only remaining chance."

"But that will be impossible," said the professor, setting down the lamp. "It is more than thirty feet to the sidewalk."

"Impossible" is a word not in my dictionary when duty calls," muttered Hawk.

He threw up a sash, and looked down into the deserted street.

It was, indeed, a deep plunge.

Far too deep to risk a jump, and there was no chance of clambering down the front of the house.

Neither was there any tree-top into which he might have leaped with safety, as he had leaped ere this.

None; but there were some telegraph wires, and the nearest post stood before the next house but one.

But though on a level with the window-sill, the wires followed the line of the curb-stone below, with the breadth of the sidewalk between.

Nevertheless, Hawk resolved to avail himself of these wires.

"Let me have your handkerchief, mynheer," said he, while muffling his right hand in his own, for he had no gloves.

Mr. Schmidt, who now comprehended the attempt about to be made, handed him another handkerchief.

This served the detective's left hand in a similar way, and, thus prepared, he made a gesture of farewell, and began crawling through the window.

"Wait a moment, my friend," said Mr. Schmidt. "Tell me one thing first."

"Never fear for your own safety," said Hawk. "I'll bear your situation in mind."

"Oh, it isn't that, my son. I know I have nothing more to fear now that those rascals imagine they have the coveted documents in their hands."

"What is it, then?"

"Satisfy my curiosity on one point."

"Certainly, if I can."

"Why, think you, did Dupont, in the conversation we overheard, make no allusion to the papers of which he had robbed me such a short time before?"

"The deuce! Can you not guess?"

"No, my son, else I would not ask."

"Why, the rascal doubtless deemed the theft too important to give away to his vulgar assistant. It is a precious morsel of intelligence fit only for the ear of the monarch of criminals, the great Kotzka himself."

"Ah, do you really think so?"

"I am sure of it. Good-by."

Hawk now straightened himself up on the outer window ledge, with his back to the sashes, and his face toward the wires.

The intervening space was all of twelve feet, and, should he miss his flying grasp, the stones below would be pitiless.

But the leap was indispensable.

Calling every physical and nerve force to his aid, he at last made it.

The attempt was successful.

As he clutched two of the wires in his protected hands, his weight together with the momentum of his fall sagged them down so far that he had no need of making his way along the line to the adjacent pole, as he had first intended.

He had merely to drop, which he did, landing on the sidewalk in a standing position, and receiving something of a shaking up, but no material injury.

With a parting gesture toward the old professor, who was still looking down at him from the window, Hawk hurried away.

The light of a new and cloudless day was broadening in the eastern sky as he boarded an Elevated train a few minutes later, and there was every prospect of his reaching the Brooklyn Bridge entrance on time.

But it often happens that man proposes while corporational negligence disposes of this work-a-day world.

An accident on the Elevated track brought train to a stand-still, which threatened to be a serious detention, at the Grand-street station.

Hawk deserted the train, intending to make the rest of the way on foot.

Another obstacle presented itself.

A fire was in progress close at hand, and the street corners were so packed with noisy sight-seers as to be almost impassable.

Our hero was so exasperated that he half-ascribed these interceptions, in his excited imagination, to some new and occult machinations on the part of his arch-foe.

He instantly banished this impression as wholly unworthy of him.

But presently an incident occurred that served to give it both color and body.

As he was forcing his way slowly through the crowd, two men, both of whom he fancied he dimly recognized, objected to his wedge-wise tactics, and, turning upon him, assailed him with a torrent of abuse in a foreign tongue.

"Keep your tempers, my friends!" said Hawk, doing his best to keep his own. "It is absolutely necessary that I should get through—a case of life and death—and I do not mean to inconvenience any one."

A fresh volley of outlandish curses was the answer, and one of the men flourished a cudgel over his head.

This was taxing the detective's patience too far.

He promptly knocked the fellow down, and proceeded to give his companion a lesson on the most approved scientific principles.

But if the ruffians had purposed to delay his progress, this was effected.

By the time Hawk had polished off his second antagonist, a dense crowd had collected about them, and a policeman put in an appearance.

Not chancing to be acquainted with the officer, an elaborate explanation was required to pacify him, which was none the more shortened by its being corroborated by the majority of the bystanders.

In this way much valuable time was lost.

Then, again, Hawk had no sooner disengaged himself than his late antagonists darted past him, and he overheard one of them say to the other in Italian: "Never mind; we'll get another chance to interrupt him!"

"We'll see about that!" thought our hero, and, as they had taken his direction, he started in pursuit.

Away they sped, down the Bowery, under the Chatham Square Elevated station, down Chatham street, to the very entrance of the bridge.

Here Hawk lost his fugitives, but brought up himself almost in the arms of Seagrave, who, true to agreement, was patrolling the entrance to the right-hand roadway.

"Two foreigners, bearded and swarthy, one with a bloody nose?" gasped Hawk. "Quick! did you see them?"

"Yes; but you are too late. They passed in, and are well out on the promenade ere this."

Hawk stamped his foot, but did not continue the pursuit.

"It would be no use," he growled. "I can only hope they are not in Kotzka's pay."

"What is the matter?"

Hawk briefly related his last adventure.

Seagrave was disposed to make light of it.

"Where is Nixey?" said Hawk.

Seagrave pointed to a lofty telegraph-pole at the junction of Center street and City Hall Park.

Perched on its summit was the irrepressible street-arab, who waved his hand airily as an indication that he was on the lookout for the big dapple-gray and the black-and-yellow coupe.

"Good enough!" commented Hawk. "I shall follow the vehicle by the roadway, while you and Nixey take the promenade to the middle of the bridge. There you will clamber over the intervening railway, and gain the roadway in advance of the dapple-gray."

"What! the middle of the bridge?"

"Certainly; there will be less likelihood of police interference there."

"But if one of us should chance to be tossed over the rail?"

Hawk Heron laughed.

"What then?" said he. "It is only a matter of two hundred and thirty feet to the river's surface."

"Ah!"

"But of course such an anticipation is not agreeable, so we'll drop it. Above all, be on your guard against a flanking attack from those two rascals who just eluded me."

"Make yourself easy, Hawk," said Seagrave. "Let me only get a grip on the dapple-gray's bridle-rein, revolver in hand, and Nixey and I will perform our part of the programme."

This was said in a quietly resolute way that was encouraging in itself.

It was a clear and beautiful morning, and the sun was just trembling on the rise.

The southern roadway was as yet almost deserted. But numerous teams were coming over from Brooklyn by the opposite side, the promenade was already thronged with its living tide, composed almost wholly of young working-people, all setting in one direction, New-Yorkward, in obedience to labor's morning summons, while fresh girlish faces and tasteful costumes dotted the press that was pouring out of the gates.

In the shadow of the arched approach nestled the smoky roofs and narrow, awakening streets, while far out under the lofty and superb span from hore to shore sparkled the broad waters of East river, with the varied craft upon their breast, the tallest-masted of which failed to brush the web-like beams and girders of the structure so airily but stanchly arching them.

Hawk had crossed the mouth of the south roadway, and was talking to a policeman of his acquaintance, in order to prepare him for the scene that was about to be enacted, when Seagrave called to him.

"Nixey is signaling," said the latter, as Hawk rejoined him.

Hawk glanced toward the lad, who was now seen descending in great haste from his lofty perch.

"Ay!" said he; "the tug of war is at hand. Don't forget my instructions."

At this moment they were joined by Nixey.

"It's headin' for us, boss," said he.

"From what direction?"

"Down Center street, but there's two coves on the box, boss."

"Never mind. Go with Seagrave. He has the instructions. Lose no time."

Then, as his subordinates darted through the promenade gates, he slipped behind the Elevated railroad stairway, and waited.

Three minutes later, the black-and-yellow coupe was trundling over the deserted roadway, with our hero in hot pursuit.

The middle of the bridge was reached.

Seagrave and Nixey already had the dapple-gray by the head, while covering the men on the box with their pistols, and Hawk, likewise revolver in hand, was tearing open the door of the coupe.

He already had his left arm about Olga, and was thrusting the muzzle of his pistol into Kotzka's mouth.

At this instant, however, the two ruffians who had intercepted Hawk at Grand street clambered over the railway to their chief's assistance, swearing like troopers and brandishing their clubs.

Kotzka and the men on the coupe took advantage of this diversion—the former to dash aside the pistol, drag back his prisoner, and then leap after Hawk, who had just received a stunning blow from behind, while Dupont and his companion leaped from their seat and made themselves active.

Several shots were fired, and the struggle grew desperate.

Dazed as he was, Hawk flew at Kotzka's throat, when another dastardly blow from behind completed his momentary helplessness.

Before he could recover from it he was in Kotzka's herculean grasp, and being whirled aloft.

"Ha, ha, ha!" roared the giant. "Let us see if you escape this time, my falcon beauty!"

With that he hurled the detective far out over the outer rail—out, out over the yawning river-gulf!

CHAPTER XXIX.

LIGHT AHEAD.

FATE again interposed to rescue our hero from the all-but certain death that seemed to yawn for him after being hurled from Brooklyn Bridge.

It chanced that a great clipper ship, whose exceptionally tall topmasts nearly scraped the lower edge of the arching span, was being towed under the bridge at the instant Hawk was launched into space.

Into the loose-flapping main-royal of this providential vessel he accordingly fell, with just sense and strength enough to grasp with the tenacity of despair several ropes that came to his hands.

Here he remained almost helpless till assisted to the deck by some sailors, for his miraculous escape had been witnessed not only by those on board, but also by many others.

The air had greatly revived him.

He was almost his old dauntless self again upon reaching the deck.

Without pausing to more than thank the officers and crew of the Flying Scud, as the vessel was named, Hawk hailed a passing tug, clambered into it, and made an offer to be put ashore on the Brooklyn side, which was promptly accepted.

Landing at the foot of Washington street, Hawk hurried up the hill toward the bridge terminus.

Midway he met Ralph and Nixey.

They were sorrowfully bent on making inquiries as to the discovery of his dead body.

The joyfulness of the unexpected meeting can better be imagined than described.

"A miracle!" exclaimed Seagrave, delightedly.

"Hooray!" cried Nixey, fairly dancing a jig around our hero, when the latter had briefly related the manner of his escape. "Hawk Heron hereafter ag'in' fire an' flood!"

"How did you two make out on the bridge?" asked Hawk, leading the way into a small hotel private room near at hand.

"They were too many for us, boss!" said Nixey, hanging his head.

"Ha!"

"Yes, boss; they got away with the young lady. But Mr. Seagrave here got on to something good."

Hawk turned eagerly to Ralph.

"I've got the missing half of the Russian manuscript!" cried the latter, shaking a paper over his head.

"Ha! It was then in the coupe?"

"Yes; stuck fast between the inside cushions, as I had thought. I secured it in the fight on the bridge."

Hawk signed them to draw up to a writing-table, and produced the first half of the manuscript, with the translation Seagrave had made.

"Quick!" he exclaimed, with sparkling eyes. "Translate afresh, Ralph; and then for the comparison!"

The translation of the newly-acquired fragment produced the following:

ORK, October 12, 18—.
DOVOSKI,
in Consulate,
New York City.

SIR:—

able to give the desired
cerning the organiza-
ary Martyrs in this
first be assured of
ard, together with
ditional pardon
nt protection against
of the Society.
in the councils of
that my informa-
tly relied on as
fountain head.
the same pre-
fore. "K."

This translation, pieced on to that presented to the reader in Chapter XXI, made the following complete communication:

"NEW YORK, October 12, 18—.

"TO HIS EXCELLENCY,
"COUNT RUDOVOSKI,
"Russian Consulate,
"New York City.

"HONORED SIR:—

"I am fully able to give the desired information concerning the Organization of Revolutionary Martyrs in this city, but I must be assured of the promised reward, together with the Czar's unconditional pardon and subsequent protection against the vengeance of the Society.

"I am so high in the councils of the conspirators that my information can be implicitly relied on as proceeding from the fountain head.

"Answer with the same precautions as heretofore. "K."

This having been effected, Hawk secured the several papers and sprung to his feet with a radiant face.

"Come!" he exclaimed; "no time is to be lost. This night we shall have run down our game."

"What?" cried his companions, in one breath.

"Ay, my friends; this very night Kotzka shall be in irons, and the murderer of Olga's mother, Clarisse and the old captive shall be on the high road to the scaffold!"

"This very night?" repeated Ralph.

"Ay, for I have discovered that the Brotherhood, of which Kotzka is the chief, are then to assemble again in the cellar-hall of the old brewery."

"Well?"

"Kotzka will of course be present, to continue his treacherous scheme of betraying his own associates to the Czar's representative."

"Well?"

"We shall also be present, our knowledge of the grips and passwords affording us entrance."

"Well?"

"We shall have policemen with us, in disguise."

"What more?"

"Zounds! Can you ask? I shall denounce Kotzka to his associates, producing these documentary evidences of his contemplated treachery, together with such others as I can obtain from the Russian Consul himself."

"You will, then, confer with Count Rudovoski?"

"With no more delay than it will take to effect a suitable change in my appearance," said Hawk, looking down over his fire laddie's uniform. "After that, with the full proof of Kotzka's designs in my possession, can you doubt of the effect upon his fellow-conspirators?"

"No," cried Ralph. "It will be immense!"

"They'll foam at the mouth an' chew things!" said Nixey.

"I should say so! We all know the desperate character of those oath-bound fanatics. Their revengeful fury will be like that of wounded tigers. Gad! if we shall only succeed in preserving Kotzka for the hangman's noose, I shall be satisfied."

The friends were now equally enthusiastic over the decisive measures in prospect.

They ordered a substantial breakfast, and, while eating it, considered the best manner of dividing the work before them.

It was finally decided that, while Hawk was looking after the Russian Consul, Seagrave and Nixey should discover the new retreat to which Olga had been carried, and telegraph the result to him at the Police Head-quarters in New York, after which a fresh rendezvous would be in order.

With this understanding, they separated.

About an hour later, as Hawk Heron, fittingly attired, emerged from his head-quarters' dressing-room, he received word that the chief of the Detective Bureau wished to speak with him.

Hawk was no sooner alone with his superior than he perceived him to be in an ill-humor.

"So," said the chief, peremptorily; "what have you to report with regard to your special case?"

Hawk hesitated but an instant before replying, with quiet confidence:

"It will be wound up to-night, captain."

"What?"

"My man shall then be in custody, and I shall have the evidence to secure his conviction." The chief's manner softened perceptibly.

"I am really glad, Heron, to hear you speak thus confidently," said he. "In spite of the short time allotted us to run down the murderer of the widow Ashcombe and her daughter, the public and the newspapers are abusing us unmercifully."

"I know it, captain; their abuse shall cease after to-night."

"Good! Do you require anything?"

"Yes. A letter of introduction, if you please, to Count Rudovoski, the Russian Consul, such as will cause him to respect my authority."

The chief looked surprised, but at once set about framing the desired letter, without making comment.

"There you are," said he, at length.

Hawk was about taking his departure when his superior riveted him with a peculiar look.

"How about Mr. Blithers?" said he.

Hawk with difficulty concealed a tell-tale start of surprise.

"He knows more than I do about Blithers," he said to himself. "Let me be careful lest I show my ignorance."

He then winked gravely in response to the chief's peculiar look, but kept an immovable face.

"What about him, captain," said he, dryly.

"That is what I want to know of you, sir. Anything peculiar about Mr. Blithers?"

"Yes, infernally peculiar," said Hawk, hiding his bewilderment under an assumption of intense cunning. "I was going to tell you about that a little later on."

The chief looked a little disappointed, like one who has unavailingly sprung a trap from which he promised himself a piece of satisfaction.

"All right, Heron," said he, terminating the interview with a gesture. "I have also found out something oddly peculiar about Blithers. Return here in an hour or two, and we may compare notes to advantage."

Hawk replied with another solemn wink as he quitted the room.

"What the deuce is up?" he thought, on his way out of the building. "By Jove! I would run up to the Brunswick and interview Blithers at once, if I had time."

"Telegram just come for you from Brooklyn, Mr. Heron," said an officer coming up from the telegraph office in the basement.

"What, from Seagrave, and so soon?" thought Hawk, hurrying down into the office. "This augurs well."

The dispatch awaiting him was, indeed, from Seagrave.

It was as follows:

"TWELFTH PRECINCT, BROOKLYN, 9:30 A. M.

"Have spotted the house. Nixey will bring you word an hour hence. All goes well. Five minutes ago our game started for New York, alone, and in red-hot haste. SEAGRAVE."

Hawk looked at his watch.

It wanted a quarter to ten.

"These foreign swells are apt to be late break-fasters," he thought. "I shall first seek my Russian count at his Madison avenue residence. What if I should come face to face with Kotzka there? So much the better!"

He lost no more time in hurrying to the Russian Consul's house.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

HALF AN hour later, Hawk Heron was in earnest conference with Count Rudovoski, at the latter's up-town residence.

"The consul's private secretary, Herr Gruben, was also present.

A meditative silence had followed an animated discussion.

Count Rudovoski, a highly intelligent, courtly gentleman, of middle age, sat facing the detective, with a half-frown on his face, and some manuscripts in his hands.

He was the first to break the silence.

"You then assure me, Mr. Heron," said he, slowly, and with but little foreign accent, "that this Ivan Kotzka is bent on deceiving me."

"Certainly," said Hawk. "He is bent on obtaining the twenty thousand rubles reward, together with the Czar's pardon, at the expense of his miserable associates. That is all."

"And those associates?"

"Are wretched, unimportant adventurers and fanatics, information with regard to whom can be of no value whatever to your government."

"Prove this to me."

"I shall do so at once."

To meet this emergency, Hawk had already obtained from a brother detective a list of hair-brained, windy socialists and anarchists, many of them Russians, which he thought would pass muster as belonging to the Brotherhood of which Kotzka was the head.

He now produced this list, and handed it to the consul.

The latter merely glanced over the names, and then cast the list impatiently away.

"Preposterous!" he exclaimed. "The names

of mere nobodies—rascals, boobies and idlers, of no account!"

"True," said Hawk. "And it is the surrender of the secrets of such obscure impotents by which Kotzka hopes to win your money and a pardon for his own political offenses."

"I see it all now. But let us come to a full understanding."

"By all means."

"You engage, then, with the possession of these proofs of Kotzka's treachery which I hold in my hand, to have him taken in custody, and speedily brought to the gallows, under the criminal laws of this community?"

"I do."

"But can you also engage that the Brotherhood which he seeks to betray, but of which he is now the controlling spirit, shall cease to exist as a secret political organization?"

Hawk pointed to the discarded list.

"You see of what material its ranks and file is composed," said he. "A brotherhood of refugees and vagabonds! What adhesiveness can such an organization possess when deprived of its master spirit?"

"Well answered. But there is, besides Kotzka, another controlling spirit—a young and remarkable woman, as beautiful as she is dangerous."

A sudden and profound melancholy fell upon our hero.

"You allude to Clarisse Letours," said he.

"Yes."

"I have reason to believe her dead."

"Dead?"

"Ay: and by the murderous hand of this same fiend in human form, Kotzka."

"This is important. Explain, I beg of you!"

Hawk did so, with terrible succinctness, without even omitting the kindred circumstances that pointed likewise to the murder of the old captive.

"This is both wonderful and horrible!" exclaimed Count Rudovoski. "Of the unfortunate young woman I know next to nothing. But the old captive—what if he might have been the Baron Tauchnitz himself, whom Kotzka was suspected of having murdered in Hungary for his estates?"

"And who, it has since been more generally supposed, died in Siberian exile?"

"The same. Such was the story circulated abroad by Kotzka and his agents. It was, however, false. Tauchnitz was never sent to Siberia. After his disappearance, he was eagerly sought by the Imperial Government for another and most benign purpose."

It was now the detective's turn to be astonished.

"For what purpose?" he exclaimed, breathlessly.

His innocence had been established, and his estates in Russia restored to him. The latter are even now awaiting his heirs, if such are living. The search of the Government was ineffectual. Tauchnitz had disappeared; so had his wife and children."

"Should the heirs, or but one of them, be produced, would the Tauchnitz estates be forthcoming?"

"Assuredly, together with an immense sum in ready money, the steadily-accruing interest for many years past. I have the papers relating to that vast estate here in my possession. But explain yourself fully, sir. Is it possible that you know of any heir or heirs?"

"I think so, but I cannot answer for a certainty till, say to-morrow morning. In the mean time, however, I can assure you that the old captive, who has doubtless been murdered by Kotzka, was the Baron Tauchnitz."

"Ha! Will you prove it?"

"Yes; at the same time I produce the heir, or heirs. Now, Count Rudovoski, will you give me those papers?"

"With confidence," said the count, handing them to him, "and Heaven prosper your undertaking!"

"Thanks. One more question, count."

"A dozen, if you like."

"Kotzka has called on you in person?"

"Yes; and in disguise."

"Ah, I understand—as Adolphe Delancourt, a French artisan?"

"Yes."

"Now let me ask you if you know a Mr. Jack Blithers, a Scotland Yard detective from London?"

The official looked at him with a peculiar smile, but made no answer.

At that instant an equipage was heard to drive up hurriedly to the front of the house.

At a sign from his superior, the secretary stepped to the window.

"It is Kotzka himself," said the latter, peering between the curtains.

Count Rudovoski gave an order in Russian.

The secretary then conducted Hawk into the entrance passage, and, just as the door-bell was rung, gently forced him into a curtained recess near the foot of the stairs.

"Remain here, sir, observantly," he whispered, "and you will like enough discover why His Excellency did not deem it worth while to reply to your last question."

He then let the curtain fall, leaving our hero considerably mystified.

He, however, peered out into the hall, and was all attention while the hated Kotzka was being admitted into the passage, and thence into Count Rudovoski's presence.

At the end of about five minutes, Kotzka came out of the drawing-room, unattended, and with a countenance expressive of much satisfaction.

Before going out by the street-door, however, he stood before a hat-rack mirror, with his back to Hawk, and, drawing some articles from the bosom of his coat, proceeded to effect a self-transformation with the expertness of a lightning-change performer.

When he again turned toward Hawk's place of concealment, in quitting the house, it was no longer as Count Kotzka, the Proscribed, but as bluff and blonde Jack Blithers, of Scotland Yard.

As Hawk stepped out of his hiding-place, with a half-stupefied expression, Count Rudovoski looked out of the drawing-room with his peculiar smile rather emphasized.

Hawk understood it perfectly now.

He merely masked his sense of humiliation under a profound bow, and hurried away.

The equipage had already disappeared.

"Well, well," muttered Hawk, grinding his teeth while making a bee-line for the Hotel Brunswick; "poor Clarisse rather understated the case, after all. She said that Kotzka had a passion for disguises, when she should have said 'a genius', 'a stupendous genius', for them! The man is almost a necromancer!"

Hawk was, therefore, not greatly surprised to learn at the hotel that "Mr. Blithers" had disappeared the night before, leaving his baggage behind him, and without paying his bill.

"Now for another bout with my worthy superior," thought Hawk, assuming his most sphinx-like expression, as he once more betook himself to Head-quarters. "If the chief thinks he has got dead-wood on me, I fancy he'll find himself mistaken."

"Well, Heron," said the chief of the Detective Bureau when Hawk was again alone with him, "how did you get along with the Russian Consul?"

"Capitally," was the reply. "I shall nab my man to-night."

"Good! With Blithers's assistance eh?"

Hawk stared, and then burst into a laugh.

"What!" he exclaimed; "is it possible you don't know who Blithers really is?"

The chief looked disappointed.

"I know that he isn't Blithers at all, for that matter," he growled.

Hawk waved his hand a little contemptuously.

"Oh, that has stood to reason all along!" said he. "The bogus Blithers, Count Kotzka, Max Steinman, *et cetera*, are one and the same."

"The deuce you say!"

Hawk smiled and chuckled knowingly. He felt it a real pleasure to get back at the chief in that way.

"Of course," said he, off-handedly. "But all his personations will be melted in one when I get my hooks on him to-night."

"But how do you imagine he got possession of the real Blithers's papers and baggage, so as to personate him so successfully?"

Hawk imagined boldly, and with the best of luck.

"Ah, Kotzka must have put in fine work there," said he, admiringly. "In the first place, he doubtless got secret word from London as to Blithers's personal appearance, and the probable date of his arrival here."

"Yes; and what then?"

"In the next place, the real Blithers must have been a big, portly, florid man, very much of Kotzka's build."

"Right again; what next?"

"Gad! isn't it plain as the nose on your face, Cap? Why, Kotzka must have murdered him on the lonely pier landing at daybreak, assumed his character forthwith, and taken possession of his papers and baggage."

"By Jove, Heron, you're a regular magician! That is just the way the villain must have worked it. The real Blithers's dead body has just been brought from the river-bottom at the foot of the pier, and identified."

"Poor fellow! but the discovery was only a question of time. Stab or bullet wounds on body?"

"Neither. The garroter's twist."

"So; I might have guessed it."

"Whither are you off to now?"

"To Brooklyn. This is the beginning of the end."

"Glad to hear it."

"Can I have six men, in civilian's dress, at the entrance of the old brewery building this evening?"

"An entire squad, if you like."

"Thank you."

And Hawk set out at once for Brooklyn, only stopping on the way to obtain old Mr. Schmidt's company.

CHAPTER XXXI.

ONCE MORE IN THE TOILS.

"BLESS me, my young friend!" said the good old German; "you have hurried me along with you so rapidly that I seem scarcely yet to have recovered my breath."

He mopped his brow with his great pocket-handkerchief as he spoke.

Hawk Heron, his companion, smiled sadly.

They were crossing the loneliest part of Prospect Park, Brooklyn, and were consequently nearing their destination.

But while their arrival there might restore the beautiful Olga to the good old music-teacher's heart, what of the yet lovelier Clarisse, the doubtless forever-vanished Clarisse, the anticipation of whose radiant presence would have caused the Falcon Detective's bosom to bound with tumultuous joy?

"One should not complain of undue haste, mynheer," sighed the young man, "when a great joy perchance is awaiting him."

"Mein Gott! what do you mean, my son?" exclaimed Mr. Schmidt, struck by the other's strange significance of tone. "But you have not yet told me where we are going."

Hawk bit his lip. He was sorry to have hinted this much, but at the supreme moment Olga might be again mysteriously snatched away, instead of being restored to them.

They were entering an unfrequented spot, near an unfinished excavation, and bordering a small lake, half-embosomed in trees.

"Yonder is our destination," said Hawk, pointing over the tree-tops to a tall, isolated building on the further side of the Park. "And we must exercise great caution in approaching it."

"But wherefore, my son?"

"Because I forgot to wait in New York for Nixey's message before coming here, and there may be danger in the air."

"Danger?"

"Yes, but let us be patient. Nixey is doubtless following us hither, and Seagrave cannot be far away."

They were now proceeding slowly under a precipitous bank, with the lake to their right, and the old excavation in their rear, Hawk being in the lead.

"But, my son, your words are mysterious," said the old man.

"They will soon be explained, mynheer. Come along!"

"But what danger is to be feared?"

"None, I hope."

"But what great joy can be in store for me in yonder grim old house?"

Before Hawk could reply, two armed ruffians started up in the path before them, as if by magic.

Hawk's revolver was out in an instant.

But a startled exclamation from his companion caused him to likewise hazard a swift look to the rear.

Two similar ruffians—wild-eyed, foreign-looking rascals—were making toward them from the direction of the excavation, in which they had doubtless been lying in ambush.

"Courage, mynheer!" said Hawk, coolly thrusting a spare revolver in the old German's hand. "Back to back is the word for the time being!"

"Have no fear for me, my son," said Mr. Schmidt, accepting the situation with unexpected coolness. "I was an Austrian soldier in my younger days."

The ruffians were advancing from either side, brandishing their bludgeons and knives, and vociferating in various foreign tongues: "Here are the accursed spies who would betray us to the Czar's minions! Kill them! It is the Master's order! Show no mercy!" or other words to the same effect.

Nevertheless, they seemed to advance with some hesitation, and to glance up along the steep bank over our friends' heads, as if half-expecting some sort of flanking assistance from that quarter.

Without understanding their hesitation, Hawk deemed it advisable to take advantage of it in the interests of peace.

"Look here!" he called out in French; "we are not the spies you take us for. Give us the chance and we will prove it."

Then Mr. Schmidt spoke to them, successively in German, Hungarian and Italian, to the same effect.

The ruffians continued their hostile demonstrations, though less violently than before, and one of them, whom Hawk now recognized as Arnold Dupont's coach-companion, Rudolph, seemed more than half-disposed to parley.

"Nonsense!" cried this man; "you are our sworn enemy. What can you prove?"

"I am not your enemy—I swear it!" replied Hawk, earnestly. "Your real enemy—the serpent spy in the bosom of your Order—is Kotzka himself!"

Most of the ruffians seemed infuriated, or rather appalled, by this charge, but Rudolph still wavered.

"Prove it!" he cried.

Hawk was nonplused for the time being.

He could not prove Kotzka's perfidy to his associates then and there, without giving away his plot for the arch-ruffian's overthrow and capture at the forthcoming conclave.

Suddenly he recollected his mastery of the Order's secret signs, grips and passwords.

He made a swift sign, which was hesitatingly responded to by Rudolph.

But at that instant there was a crashing, plunging sound overhead like the rush of a descending avalanche.

"Look out! crouch in under the bank!" yelled Rudolph. "But it is too late. You are both doomed!"

But Hawk and the German had heeded the warning in time.

Just as they had ensconced themselves under the overhanging bank, an immense boulder, secretly loosened from the side of the precipice by the ruffians' confederates, came bounding down the slope.

There was a cloud of dust and gravel, and then the huge fragment disappeared into the water with an awful plunge.

"Quick, mynheer!" whispered Hawk, seizing his companion's arm; "now is our chance!"

Before the dust of the debris had wholly cleared away, he had hurried the old man back along the narrow path, and into the excavation.

But this was only out of the frying-pan into the fire.

They at once found themselves surrounded by a perfect swarm of ruffians, who dashed the pistols out of their hands, and almost in an instant had them at their mercy.

Rudolph at this juncture put in an appearance at the head of the original attacking party.

"Parleying is out of the question now," he whispered, as Hawk and his companion were being gagged and bound with scant ceremony. "But be of good heart. You are not going to be killed right off."

With this comforting assurance, the captives were hurriedly carried toward a small rough-built sort of disused tool-house at the further extremity of the excavation.

Overgrown with bushes and surrounded by great rough-hewn blocks of stone, which concealed it from the adjacent path, it was a forlorn and lonely spot.

"In with them!" growled, in German, one of the ruffians who seemed to exercise more authority than Rudolph, and he unlocked the door of the shanty as he spoke. "Let them rot here along with the others till the Master's wishes can be known. At all events, the Sibyl will be here presently."

The captives were hurried into the dimly-lighted interior, and cast helplessly in a corner.

Then, if their gags had not prevented, they would have uttered an exclamation of astonishment and despair.

No wonder Seagrave had not yet co-operated with Hawk, and Nixey, as a messenger, was not likely to be disappointed, as Hawk had feared.

Two other prisoners, similarly gagged, bound and helpless, were already occupying the opposite corner of the shanty.

They were Seagrave and Nixey!

Dull despair began to fill the hearts of all our friends, but at this moment the door again opened, and a tall female figure, voluminously cloaked and veiled in black, abruptly entered.

However, this mysterious visitant afforded no ray of hope.

Her gestures were menacing, her eyes glittered through her veil like those of an angry pythoness, and her voice, as she spoke, seemed like the rasping of a file.

"Hence! the Master awaits you!" said she, addressing the now obsequious ruffians with harsh authority. "But first, carry off all the captives but this one. With him I have urgent business, and without witnesses."

She half-spurned our hero's prostrate form with her foot as she spoke, and at the same instant he perceived a half-concealed dagger, glistering in her right hand.

Her orders were at once obeyed.

The door again opened and closed behind the disappearing ruffians and their human burdens. Hawk was left alone with the veiled woman.

"What new female coadjutor has Kotzka here?" thought Hawk, with an inward shudder. "Some sort of desperate virago, or veiled murderer, after his own heart, most probably."

But here the woman, towering to her full height, suddenly divested herself of her cloak and veil, and shook aloft her glistering poniard.

The revelation was astounding.

In spite of the gag between his teeth, a great and terrible cry burst from Hawk Heron's lips.

CHAPTER XXXII.

BEATING HEARTS AND BUSY BRAINS.

BUT the cry that our hero had uttered was only one of immense, overmastering joy.

"Clarisse!"

Such was the next exclamation framed by his quivering lips.

It was indeed she!

The cloak and veil had fallen only to reveal the graceful yet majestic form, the youthful and radiant yet queenly features of Clarisse Letours.

She indeed waved aloft her glistering dagger, but it was only to sever his bonds with keen, flashing strokes.

"Hawk, my beloved!"

Even the counterfeit harshness of her voice melted into the velvety natural tones that were such delicious music to his ears.

And could a woman's voice, this side of Paradise, be tenderer than hers at this supreme moment? For were they not murmuring that the

rich jewel of her glorious love was to be his coronal forevermore!

Yes; the hours for modest evasion, for maidenly coyness were of no longer avail at the dissolving stroke of the arch-enchanter's wand, in the presence of Love the omnipotent, Love the divine!

The next instant they were in each other's arms.

A breathless embrace—"a kiss, a long, long kiss of youth and love"—and then for a few blissful moments they were wrapped in the delirious heart-to-heart hush, in which

"Love took up the glass of time, and turned it in his glowing hands, Every minute, lightly shaken, ran itself in golden sands;

Love took up the harp of life, and smote on all the chords with might, Smote the chord of Self which, trembling, passed in music out of sight."

But, their first transports over, the lovers were not long in recalling the more critical, if less romantic, exigencies of their situation.

"My beloved, my angel!" murmured Hawk. "Now God be praised, for I deemed you in your grave!"

"In my grave!" repeated Clarisse, with genuine wonder. "Speak, my darling! I was, perhaps, prepared for—for your astonishment and joy at this revelation of my heart's secret springs"—she blushed beautifully—"but why should you have deemed me dead, rather than merely gone away?"

He told her of his discoveries at the house in Melton place, the sanguinary indications in the basement rooms, the seeming grave, or rather double-grave, in the sub-cellar.

"Cheap, melodramatic shams, devised by Ivan Kotzka for your special benefit!" exclaimed Clarisse. "Ah! Kotzka was ever nothing if not sensational, as well as bloody. Some red paint and the shreds of a couple of his own disguising wigs would have answered his purpose in effecting his hideous shams, while of course the new-made grave was a part of his scheme. But I knew nothing of his subsequent designs when I consented to hurriedly quit the place, even at the cost of breaking my appointment with you, solely for Olga's sake."

"Need you tell me that?" said Hawk, taking her again in his arms, and kissing her. "Would you willingly have caused me the anguish I have suffered?"

"Never, my own!" and she responded to his endearment.

"Tell me about your departure with the old prisoner of the secret cell—with the unfortunate Baron von Tauchnitz."

Clarisse started. "What! you know the poor old man's identity?"

"That, and more; far more than you can conceive, Clarisse!"

She gave him a startled look. "Can he be other than the poor Baron von Tauchnitz, who has incurred the life-long resentment of our Order?" she asked.

"Not other, but more than he," replied the detective, hesitatingly. "Ask me no more at present, I beseech you!"

"But when may I? I am all in a whirl—half-bewildered!"

"Soon—perhaps in a few hours, all shall be brought to light. Be content to know that it will be a startling illumination, but not an unpleasant one."

The troubled look in her eyes gave way to a happy light.

"Am I not your beloved now?" said she, gently. "Wherefore should I not remain content?"

"My ownest own!"

And once more he folded her to his breast.

"Now let us exchange explanations, my darling," said Hawk. "I have told you of my adventures since last we met. What are yours?"

"Kotzka had no difficulty in persuading me to quit the Melton place house to make ready for Olga's reception at the retreat near here, where she arrived an hour after daybreak, as you know. I took the poor old baron in a close carriage with me. Kotzka must have prepared his ghastly mummery for your special horriification soon after our departure. He has treated Olga indifferently well since taking her from the tower prison of the old brewery, at least, not with brutality. I have looked out for that. But Kotzka is terribly depressed. He seems to have a great shadow on his mind."

"He may well seem so. It is the shadow of his approaching doom!"

"What! are you so sure?"

"The proofs of his treachery to his fellow-anarchists—his heretofore dupes—are in my possession. You will see him unmasked in the midst of his confederates this very night. Behold, Clarisse! read and judge for yourself."

With some other explanatory words he exhibited to her the pieced fragments of Kotzka's correspondence with the Czar's representative.

"God of Vengeance!" exclaimed Clarisse, examining the proofs with trembling eagerness; "and I have at one time trusted in this man's devotion to the cause in which my sire laid down his life!"

"And I, too, Clarisse, in the distant past and other climes, when this fearful man was my mentor and my friend—when the Baron von Tauchnitz knew and loved me, and your noble mother.—But what am I saying?"

She looked at him in astonishment. "My mother?" she faltered. "Explain—what mean you?"

"No more now," said he, with a deprecating gesture. "The revealing hour has not struck, though it is near at hand. No more, I beseech you! Continue, Clarisse. What of Kotzka?"

"Oh, the diabolism, the unparalleled iniquity of the traitor!" she exclaimed, as he repossessed himself of the papers. "He has defied the vengeance of the Order. Let the bolt fall!"

She was magnificent in her righteous wrath.

"It will fall, Clarisse. Fear not!"

"Oh, I see it all!" she went on. "Why have I suffered my enthusiasm, my exaltation to blind me for so long? He, and he alone, could have murdered Olga's poor mother!"

"Without a shadow of a doubt; and apart from any interests of the Order, for the basest personal and mercenary ends—to secure to himself the estates that would otherwise have fallen to his victim and her daughter upon the mere presentation of their claims thereto!"

"Heavens! what can you mean? The widow Ashcombe was then—"

"The Baroness von Tauchnitz—the wife, but who deemed herself the widow, of the poor, imbecile old prisoner who has so long been in your care!"

"And Olga his daughter? I am bewildered. It seems an impossibility."

"I have the proofs, obtained from the Russian Consul, together with the assurance that the vast Tauchnitz estates, once confiscated but soon afterward restored, are at this hour awaiting the rightful owner's claim."

"And you have the proofs of Olga's paternity?"

"Of that, and of yet more!"

"Hawk, my love, tell me all!"

"No, by my faith!" cried Hawk with a laugh, but embracing her anew. "This one bright morsel of revelation shall abide the supreme hour following upon Kotzka's overthrow."

"Cruel! but I am submissive."

"Now to the work in hand. When were Seagrave and Nixey captured?"

"An hour after their discovery of Olga's present cage."

"And by the same miscreant ruffians to whom the old German and I are indebted for a like service?"

"Yes; but rather call them credulous tools, for they are honest, according to their lights."

"Where is Blithers—I mean Kotzka—at this moment?"

"Ah! you have found out that?"

"At last. The body of the real Blithers—murdered by Kotzka—has been brought to light from its watery grave."

Clarisse shuddered.

"I feared as much," she faltered, "but tried to dismiss the suspicion."

"Is Kotzka now at Olga's new retreat?"

"Yes, and likely to remain there till the hour for to-night's conclave. Between his own fears and his jealous guard over Olga, he is likely to be sufficiently occupied."

"He once more trusts in you implicitly?"

"Absolutely, though perforce. Were it otherwise, I would not now be here."

"Surely."

"I have the outer guards solely under my authority while Kotzka is within doors," continued Clarisse. "I personally instigated the capture of Seagrave and Nixey, or they would have penetrated too far—to their own death, perchance."

"And Mr. Schmidt and I are equally indebted to your efforts?"

"Can you doubt it? Oh, my love, I wanted you especially and so dearly!"

Time pressed, but space was yet snatched for another kiss and embrace.

"True," explained Clarisse, "I ordered your capture, but not the attack that preceded it. Heavens! you might have been killed." And again she shuddered.

"Faith, and the big flanking boulder came precious near to wiping out both the professor and me in short order!" said Hawk, with a laugh. "But perhaps it is for the best that Kotzka should be kept out of our way for the present."

"Out of mine, as well!" said Clarisse, her shapely hands instinctively clinching. "Knowing what I now do, I would mistrust my self-control in his presence."

"Still, we should not be debarred improving our acquaintance with Olga and her father," said Hawk. "We deserve that much, and poor Ralph Seagrave is almost as much in love as I."

Clarisse smiled.

"Kotzka must then be got rid of for the time being," continued Hawk.

"But how?"

"That can doubtless be arranged. Have Nixey sent to me. He is near at hand, I presume."

"Yes."

CHAPTER XXXIII.

"ALL GOOD FRIENDS TOGETHER."

CLARISSE stepped to the door of the hut, and gave a low, shrill signal.

One of her uncouth followers made his appearance from among the surrounding bushes and debris.

At a whispered word, he darted away, reappeared, accompanied by the wondering Nixey, unbound and alert, and again vanished.

At the appearance of Clarisse, alive and even smiling, the lad had emitted a cry of amazed delight.

She motioned him to silence, and conducted him to the detective's presence, where sufficient explanations were vouchsafed.

Hawk had been writing a telegraph dispatch, which was as follows:

"Return hither without an instant's delay. Count R— insists on ampler details of preliminary information. Will require your constant presence here till evening. Delay not."

This was dated as coming from the house of the Russian Consul, was addressed to Kotzka, and bore the secretary's signature.

Clarisse looked up approvingly after reading the message, which her lover had placed in her hands.

"It will answer," she said.

Hawk inclosed the message in a note of explanation to the consul's secretary, and dispatched Nixey with it to 890 Madison avenue.

"It will be a good hour before Kotzka can receive the dispatch," said Hawk, glancing wistfully at a rude seat that stood at one side of the hut.

"Yes," said Clarisse, demurely.

"It would hardly do for us to show ourselves abroad till the enemy shall have taken himself off."

"Hardly."

"I wonder if our remaining friends are comfortable—released of their gags and bonds, I mean, yet still guarded against imprudent manifestations on their part."

"I have seen to that. They are in another cabin but a few paces away."

"Ah! and we have a whole hour to ourselves."

"Yes."

"Shall we find it very monotonous, think you, Clarisse?"

She raised her downcast eyes, and there was a subdued but happy light in her face.

Given but a miserable hut, with but a rude bench for a lover's seat, and security from interruption for two newly-plighted hearts, that are beating, beating, beating, throbbing, throbbing, throbbing to but one tune, that of love, love love, and evermore just love alone, and then hint of monotony in connection with one fleeting, golden hour!

Profanation of love's melting speech, were it other than playful badinage in love's behalf!

"There is one item of mystery I would have explained to me," said Hawk, after many moments of blissful communion such as lovers have. "And to ask it, we must think again of Kotzka."

"And why not, since our perils are not wholly ended yet?" said Clarisse. "To what mystery do you allude?"

"To the secret passage that must exist between that upper room in the Melton place house and the one adjoining."

"Of course, it is there."

"But I sounded the wall thoroughly, without discovering the secret."

Clarisse smiled.

"Even the shrewdest of detectives may be at fault occasionally," said she.

"I should say so," admitted he; "besides being hoodwinked, dumfounded, bound hand and foot, body and soul—especially when in love!"

She smiled again, and this time with a happy blush.

"The secret was not so much in the hearth," said she. "It was one of Kotzka's most ingenious contrivances. A pressure of the foot upon a certain spot in the hearth operated a powerful spring, and caused the entire fire-place and chimney to swing noiselessly open, thus giving admittance into the adjoining house."

"That is well worth an examination," said Hawk. "I shall attend to it at my leisure."

Presently a messenger, whom Clarisse had sent to watch Kotzka's whereabouts returned.

A telegraph dispatch, he reported, had been brought to the house, and, a few moments later, Kotzka had hurriedly summoned his inevitable black and yellow cab, and been driven away in hot haste.

The coast was clear.

Clarisse and Hawk lost no time in rejoining Seagrave and the old professor.

We pass over the astonishment of the two latter at beholding Clarisse, and the explanations that ensued.

The lovers had resolved to keep their own counsel as to the relationship existing between the old Baron von Tauchnitz and Olga till a later hour.

Clarisse had also before this exerted her authority to get rid of her foreign subordinates, so that now there was nothing in the way of the

whole party proceeding to the house which Kotzka had hired in the vicinity, and this was done at once.

Olga had at last been left with but one guard, in the person of a resolute and rather stupid female revolutionist, who was, however, obsequiously submissive to the superior authority of Clarisse.

The sorely-tried young girl was accordingly enabled to enjoy the society of her rescuers without restraint.

The most ecstatic joy manifested by either of the new-comers at meeting her, without even excepting that of Ralph Seagrave, was naturally exhibited by her old music teacher, Mynheer Schmidt, who had until that moment deemed her dead and buried in the same grave that had closed over her hapless mother's breast.

In truth, the good old German seemed well-nigh beside himself with delight.

He clasped her in his arms again and again. He laughed and wept by turns. He repeatedly demanded the story of her restoration to life, and as often interrupted the recital with the homely expressions of fatherly endearment he had been wont to lavish on her as a child. He raved, chatted, sung laughed and danced his joy, until finally Clarisse only succeeded in moderating his transports by sending out for an unlimited supply of lager beer, with which he was diligently plied until in a somewhat less obstreperous mood.

But the lovely Olga had not been averse to her old mentor's raptures, though it was only when they had in a measure subsided that she found her society principally monopolized by Ralph Seagrave, who lost no time in making himself as agreeable as might be.

Then the whilom mysterious prisoner of Melton place, the long sufferer of Revolutionist resentment, or of Ivan Kotzka's persecution, the poor old imbecile Baron von Tauchnitz, though of those present only Clarisse and Hawk knew him by that title for the time being, was brought out of his retirement, and made one of the cheerful gathering.

To be sure, he seemed but dimly conscious of his surroundings, beyond a vague and perhaps pleasurable sense of expansive kindness, sympathy and sociability, to which for many years he had been a stranger. But occasional glimpses were afforded of smoldering intelligence and memory that might require but time and gentle treatment to fan into pristine power and warmth, and his companions made the most of their opportunities to cheer and brighten that wronged, world-worn and much-bruised human heart.

Nixey did not put in a reappearance till almost nightfall, but then it was with such encouraging news as to more than make up for his tardiness.

"The big 'un has got his hands full," was his graphic way of putting it.

"Have you shadowed Kotzka, my lad?" asked Hawk.

"Like his own double, boss, many of 'em as he's had," was the reply, "from the time he bolted into the Russian nabob's roost, in answer to the telegram, to where I last left him."

"Where was that?"

"In the back room of an east-side beer-mill, boss, not far from the old brewery in the classic precincts of the Short Tail's old-time stampin' ground."

"Oho!"

"Yes, an' surrounded by a whoopin' big gang of foreign throne-smashers, all hoorayin' fit to split, for which Kotzka was settin' up the lush by the barrel. Oh, they seemed to be getting primed for a lively night, boss. They were making things jump."

Hawk arose.

"Come, my friends," said he, gravely, "we must be preparing for the crowning business at hand. This is the beginning of the end."

CHAPTER XXXIV. RETRIBUTION.

THE Revolutionists were once more in secret session.

The great underground hall of the old brewery building was brilliantly illuminated and densely thronged as upon the occasion of the reader's former glimpse into the interior.

The banners and mottoes upon the walls seemed even redder, wilder, more flamboyant and more incendiary than before.

Fanatical enthusiasts of both sexes, all ages, many nationalities, every grade and condition in life, and all phases of revolutionary politics—Socialists, Communists, Anarchists, Disruptionists, Nihilists—disturbing, or would-be disturbing forces from all quarters of Europe, as earnest and sincere as they were impractical and dangerous—filled the hall with their closely-seated, eager-faced, serried and gesticulating ranks.

A vast breeze of applause was ruffling the sea of faces turned toward the stage.

Count Ivan Kotzka, the controlling head of these wild-brained, emotional, heterogeneous human elements, and heretofore almost their idol, had just finished one of his characteristic harangues, in his most vivid, picturesque and melodramatic style.

The harangue had been an unequivocal success.

Still glowing with his oratorical effort, magnificently dressed as was his wont, the grand double-dyed arch-conspirator was just bowing his powerful and colossal personality off the platform amid a tumult of plaudits that must have been as music to his ears.

At this instant a heavily-bearded, athletic young man, in an artisan's working dress, sprung upon the platform, waving some papers which he held in his hand.

As no one seemed to recognize him, the unexpected boldness of this proceeding at once challenged and obtained renewed attention amid a breathless silence.

The new orator was swift to avail himself of the opportunity.

The first ringing sentence he gave utterance to thrilled through the assemblage like an electric shock.

"That man who has just addressed you, Count Ivan Kotzka," he cried, "is a foul and perfidious traitor, who has this day sold you out to the Czar's representative in this city, and I am prepared to prove what I charge, by documentary and other evidence, right here on the spot!"

The effect of these words was indescribable.

A tremendous tumult was the result.

Kotzka, thunder-struck, had started back, and turned pale, but instantly recovered himself.

"The charge is false!—ridiculous as it is false!" he thundered. "Ha, ha, ha! Who is this unknown scoundrel that dares to make it? I recognize him, if you do not. Behold him in the person of Hawk Heron, the *pseudo* detective, whom I have so often held up to your scorn and resentment as a hired Russian spy!"

Hawk, for it was indeed he, tore off the false beard from his face, and stood self-confessed!

"Comrades, I am no spy, as you shall presently acknowledge," he cried, in his clear incisive tones. "Let me read to you one of the documents, in Kotzka's familiar handwriting, that I hold in my hand, and if you are not satisfied of his treason, his perfidy—"

But here his voice was drowned in a storm of angry dissent. The vast majority were still Kotzka's credulous and purblind dupes. Threatening demonstrations against the stranger were not wanting.

Hawk strove again and again to make himself heard, but in vain.

Kotzka made a significant gesture.

A hundred wild figures were already on their feet, some even rushing toward the platform. Here and there a deadly weapon saw the light.

The roar was deafening, but terrible expressions, such as "Kill him!" "Tear him to pieces!" "Pulverize him!" "Cut out his heart!" "Down with the spy!" "Trample him to death!" here and there made themselves distinguishable above it, as individual detonations above the war of heaven's artillery in the climax of a great thunder-storm.

It looked very much as if our hero was doomed.

But a sudden diversion was caused by a tall, graceful and superbly-attired figure struggling out of the seething mass, like a mist-sprite out of the fury of a cataract, and gliding somehow to a commanding position on the rostrum like a rainbow on the tempest's brow.

It was Clarisse!

Needless to say that; but, with a familiar and controlling influence over those wild spirits that was superior to even Kotzka's, she swept out her arm with an imperious gesture; her eyes flashed, her lips parted, her glorious bosom rose and fell; and the maddened human sea relapsed into respectful and attentive calm as at the stroke of an enchanter's wand.

"Brethren," she cried, "do you believe in my truth, in my fidelity?"

A roar of assent was her answer, and Kotzka's quivering lips wore a triumphant smile.

"Then I swear to you that the charges made by Hawk Heron against Count Kotzka are true!"

The current changed as if by magic. It was Kotzka's turn to start back appalled at the furious storm directed against him.

Clarisse still managed to make herself heard.

"I have seen the proofs of his treachery in his own handwriting!" she cried. "They are unmistakable. Not only has Kotzka bargained for your betrayal, in consideration for the Czar's pardon and the Czar's gold, but his other offenses against our Order are equally foul! He has subverted our interests to his private ends. The Baron von Tauchnitz, so long your life-captive under Kotzka's charge, is innocent, and he has always known it! I also brand him as the ruthless destroyer, in his own mercenary behalf, of that poor prisoner's wife, the Baroness von Tauchnitz, and the abductor of her daughter Olga! He is the so-called widow Ashcombe's midnight murderer! The proofs against him are overwhelming and indisputable! Let him deny it, if he dare!"

She would have gone on, but she had already loosened the whirlwind.

Kotzka, backed against the platform wall, knife in hand, foaming at the mouth, gnashing his teeth, was already confronting a hundred of

his enraged dupes, trooping down upon him like wolves.

Seagrave, Mr. Schmidt and Nixey, together with Rudolph and others who had been let into the secret beforehand, were rushing to Hawk's support, as the latter was now, having signaled the police in waiting, chiefly intent upon preserving the baited monster for the talons of the law.

Olga, also present under Clarisse's protection, had reached the latter's side, frightened and trembling.

It was as Hawk had feared, now that the exposure had come, the main difficulty was in saving Kotzka from being torn to pieces.

Again the clarion voice of Clarisse rung out above the din with terrible distinctness.

"He is the widow Ashcombe's murderer!" she iterated. "Let him deny it, if he dare!"

"Deny it? I deny nothing!" yelled the cornered giant, now fighting for his life—snarling, lashing out and struggling tooth and nail, like a monarch of the jungle in the hunters' toils. "Kotzka denies nothing! It is all true, and more! He dies, as he has lived, unpitying and unpitied! Dupes, fools, miscreants, scum of the earth—"

But neither his secret armor nor his super-human cunning, neither his giant strength nor his magnificent courage, availed him now.

In another instant, the thirsters for his life swept over his prostrate and trampled body.

It was only by the efforts of a platoon of police, who at that moment swept into the hall in obedience to Hawk Heron's signal, that he was finally rescued from the mob, bruised, bleeding, disfigured and half-stripped of his clothing, and carried off to prison.

The monster had been caged at last.

CHAPTER XXXV.

"ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL."

LATE on the afternoon of the following day, there was a joyous gathering in the isolated Brooklyn house which had recently become the temporary domicile of Olga, Clarisse and the Baron von Tauchnitz.

The secret of relationship had been made known to both Olga and the old baron.

Yes, to even the baron himself, who was sitting in an easy-chair before the roaring fire, with the soft light of a new happiness and a slowly but surely awakening intelligence stealing over his countenance as he held his new-found daughter's hand in his.

A tender light of happiness was in Olga's sweet eyes, though subdued by the fresh recollection of her recent terrible bereavement.

Ralph Seagrave, quietly contented, was also at her side, and from the hopeful look on his face it was evident that he meant to aspire to the hand of Olga von Tauchnitz with as much encouragement as he had striven for the heart of Olga Ashcombe, when only the beautiful but obscure singer of the Thalia Theater.

Clarisse and Mr. Schmidt were in earnest conversation over some formidable-looking documents, which had been sent to the house a short time before, with the compliments of Count Rudovoski, the Russian Consul.

These papers were the certified indentification of Olga's father as the real Baron von Tauchnitz, setting forth his pardon for past political offenses by the Czar, together with the details of the princely estates in southwestern Russia and elsewhere which had long been awaiting his claim.

Hawk and Nixey alone, of the group who have chiefly figured in our pages, were absent.

The former, however, presently arrived, and Clarisse hastily arose to greet him with a charming blush in her beautiful face.

But the detective was serious, as well as cordial, and there was a gravity in his manner as he responded to her joyful welcome.

"What is it?" said she, while the others also looked up expectantly. "Have you fresh tidings for us?"

"Tidings of both joy and sorrow," said Hawk, kissing her. "But let the joy come first. It is another revelation, Clarisse."

"Yet another?"

"Yes; you have told me that you have no recollection of your mother?"

"True."

"You were taken away from her at an early age by your father, whom you only remember as Monsieur Letours, the sometime companion of Kotzka, the wandering revolutionary agent, who, you were taught to believe, finally met an exile's death amid the wastes of Siberia, after which you became the *protegee* of the Order, the daughter of the Cause for which he had—disappeared?"

"For which he laid down his life, you mean. All this is true, but—"

"Strange," interrupted her lover, half-musically. "Strange that your sire could have deemed it advisable to lead that mysterious double-life—now with his devoted wife and younger child in his ancestral home—then wandering aimlessly, or in the interests of a secret propaganda, and with his other, his eldest child, ignorant of his real name, as the sole companion of his perils!"

"What mean you?"

"Can you not guess?"

"No. I am bewildered."

"Clarisse, I have told you that in the old days, when I was the friend of the Baron von Tauchnitz, and the boyish pupil of the terrible Kotzka, it was my wont to dance the infant Olga on my knee, and rejoice in her noble mother's friendship."

"True."

"Well, in the same old days, though in different places, was it my wont to fondle you, her elder sister by a year, though it has escaped your memory?"

"Her elder sister? Whose—I—Olga's?"

"The same. I swear it! The proofs are in Mr. Schmidt's possession. Monsieur Letours was never sent to Siberia, but, through Kotzka's machinations, finally had his personality remerged into that of the Baron von Tauchnitz, when the latter, falsely accused of treachery to the Order, was torn from the active world in your childhood, to become the secret prisoner under Kotzka's care."

"Oh, Heavens! can this be true?" gasped Clarisse, while Olga had likewise started to her feet, clasping her hands.

"As true as God's white truth!" said the detective, solemnly. "Letours and Tauchnitz were one and the same; Clarisse and Olga are sisters!"

The sisters rushed into each other's arms, and a moment later, still embracing, they were kneeling and sobbing at the knees of their common father, whose tears were likewise flowing, a pathetic tribute to the joy that he was not yet fully able to understand.

"It has been a long, a complicated and painful mystery, but the solution has come at last, and all's well that ends well," said Hawk, after a long pause. "Now comes the evil news to top the good. Our peril is not wholly ended."

They all looked up at him.

"Kotzka has escaped!"

Escaped!

There was a chill of fear, from which no one in the room was exempt.

With that fiend in human form once more at liberty, no wonder that there was a fresh sensation of dread and insecurity.

Hawk went on to give the details of the intelligence as it had come to his knowledge a few hours previously at Police Headquarters in Mulberry street, after which he had hurried away to attend to another pressing affair, leaving Nixey to gather fuller particulars.

Kotzka's genius for disguises had once more served his turn. Early that morning, a strange woman of exceptionally large and powerful frame, had, by a suspicious laxity on the part of the prison authorities, succeeded in obtaining admission to Kotzka's cell. She was doubtless one of his still faithful male adherents in disguise. At all events, half an hour later it was discovered that Kotzka had slipped through the prison gate, after investing himself in his visitor's wearing apparel, so closely followed by the visiting stranger, similarly attired, as to cause some bewilderment in the stupid gate-keeper's mind, but no downright suspicion as to the real state of the case until it was too late to be remedied.

Since then a general alarm had been given, the public, already greatly excited over the news of Kotzka's arrest, were wild with a hundred rumors connected with his escape.

Such were all the particulars Hawk had brought, but even while he was reciting them there came a sharp ring at the door-bell.

It was the faithful Nixey who then burst into the room, flaunting the latest edition of an evening paper, and with a glowing face that transmitted its radiance and warmth to the rest of the group.

"All up with the big 'un this time, an' no re-
prieve!" bawled the lad in his excitement. "But the gallow's is cheated. Found dead in a Harlem lumber-yard, with fifty stab-wounds on his corpus! Supposed to have been inflicted by the throne-upsetters whom he would have betrayed. Here's the particulars, folks; read 'em for yourselves."

Such indeed, were the latest details, as set forth by the newspaper reporter, though doubtless in choicer, if less picturesque, language than our little friend Nixey employed.

This, then, was the end of the long mystery, the varied though headlong pursuit, and the cruel murder of the Gotham Flats was at last avenged.

But little remains to be told that cannot be readily anticipated without the telling.

There were no consequent marriages until the Baron von Tauchnitz was adjudged to have been almost completely restored to mental and bodily health.

This was in the ensuing February, and on a certain old-time anniversary in that month, which was none other than St. Valentine's Day, Hawk Heron, the Falcon Detective, was happily married to Clarisse, the beautiful elder daughter of the baron, and a companion ceremony served for the espousal of Olga, the no less lovely sister, to Ralph Seagrave.

It is hardly necessary to add that Hawk is no longer a professional detective, or that Ralph

has permanently relinquished the study of medicine.

Young men with young, loving, beautiful and immensely rich brides could scarcely be expected to turn out otherwise.

Soon after the knots were tied, the couples set out with the old baron to help him take possession of his hereditary estates, accompanied, we may be sure, by the honest old music-teacher and the irrepressible graduate of the Short Tail Gang.

When last heard from, they were all happy in their stately home beyond the sea; but not the less have both Hawk and Seagrave, together with their wives, signified their determination of ultimately returning to make their permanent home in the land of the free and the home of the brave.

"Once Americans, always Americans," is doubtless their patriotic motto; and, judging by their past careers, it is one that they will be likely to live up to until the end.

THE END.

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